Introduction

Educators,

The National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) is the only national museum dedicated to the Native peoples of North, South, and Central America. Chartered by Congress in 1989 as the sixteenth museum of the Smithsonian Institution, its mission is to recognize and affirm to Native communities and the non-Native public the historical and contemporary cultures and cultural achievements of Native peoples of the Western Hemisphere.

Most of the museum’s 850,000-piece collection was assembled by New Yorker George Gustav Heye, who, after a trip to the American Southwest in 1897, became fascinated with Native cultures and spent the next fifty years building an unparalleled collection of Indian objects. He hired a team of professional archaeologists, ethnologists, and field collectors to collect for him throughout the Western Hemisphere. Today, the result is generally considered to be the most comprehensive private Native American collection ever assembled, and it is now the core collection of the NMAI. The museum’s broad range of exhibitions and programs, in Lower Manhattan in New York and on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., have built on this legacy, creating a Native place to explore the past, present, and future of Native cultures.

We hope that this website, created in conjunction with the exhibition Infinity of Nations: Art and History in the Collections of the National Museum of the American, on view at the museum in New York, will assist you in teaching students about Native Americans. Infinity of Nations presents more than seven hundred works of art from throughout Native North, Central, and South America. This assemblage of American Indian cultural material represents the tremendous breadth of the collections and the remarkable richness of Native traditional and contemporary art. It also explores the historic importance of a significant number of these deeply cultural and social objects.

Designed for students, the site is divided into three sections: a gallery, where students can explore twenty-five works of art including headdresses, significant cultural objects, and contemporary art; the Culture Quest, which focuses on ten objects; and Meet the Artist, where students can learn about five Native American artists and their modern creations.

Throughout the site two particular concepts hold true. Make every effort to convey these ideas to your students as they use this site.

**NATIVE COMMUNITIES ARE DIVERSE.** Each group of Native people is distinct. There is no one “Indian” language or way of thinking. Indigenous communities from across the Western Hemisphere number in the thousands. Each community or tribe is unique. While there can often be similarities among groups, tribes can also be as different from one another as people from Japan and Germany.

Explain to your students that, in the same way that each child in the class has a family
that is special and distinct, American Indian communities are not all exactly alike. One way to help them understand this is to talk about how diversity is based on the places where we live. The places and the resources to which different people have access play a part in what makes us different from one another. When students are in the museum, have them point out some of the differences they notice among objects. For example, in the past, why would the Haudenosaunee people of the Eastern Woodlands have built houses out of birch tree branches and bark, while the Lakota people of the Great Plains made their houses out of buffalo hides? Talk to your students about the different animals that inhabit various parts of the country, and about how climates vary in different places. This will help them understand that not everyone is the same.

NATIVE PEOPLE ARE STILL HERE. The cultures of the indigenous peoples of the Americas are living cultures. There continue to be thriving Native communities that incorporate their traditional ways into their contemporary lives. While American Indian people may have struggled through periods of population decline and cultural loss over the past five hundred years, they have not vanished or became extinct.

Talk with your students about the fact that most Native kids their age are a lot like them—they go to school, wear sneakers and jeans, listen to music on their iPods, and hang out with friends on the weekend. Check out the museum’s My World book series to enhance this point. (The books are available at the NMAI stores in New York and Washington, DC, or at the NMAI’s online bookshop. Visit www.AmericanIndian.si.edu and click on Bookshop.)

Commonly Asked Questions

- What is the correct terminology: American Indian, Indian, Native American or Native?
- What are the Indian populations of the United States, Canada and Latin America?
- What is a tribe and how many are there?

1) What is the correct terminology: American Indian, Indian, Native American or Native?

All of the above terms are acceptable. The consensus, however, is that whenever possible, Native people prefer to be called by their specific tribal name. Native peoples in the Western Hemisphere are best understood as thousands of distinct communities and cultures. Many Native communities have distinct languages, religious beliefs, ceremonies, and social and political systems. The inclusive word Indian (a name given by Christopher Columbus, who upon his arrival in the Caribbean mistakenly believed he had sailed to India) says little about the diversity and independence of the cultures.

In Central and South America the direct translation for Indian has negative connotations, so Spanish speakers use the word indígenas.

Adapted from Do All Indians Live in Tipis? Questions & Answers from the National Museum of the
2) What are the Indian populations of the United States, Canada and Latin America?

According to the U.S. Census of 2010, the American Indian and Alaska Native population totals 2,932,248, or nine-tenths of 1 percent of the total population of the country. An additional 2,288,331 people reported themselves as American Indian or Alaska Native in combination with other races. The total proportion of the population, then, that identified itself as entirely or partially American Indian was 1.7 percent. In the U.S. Census of 2000, the ten states with the largest American Indian populations were (in order) California, Oklahoma, Arizona, Texas, New Mexico, New York, Washington, North Carolina, Michigan, and Alaska.

Census figures, however, should not be taken at face value, since they do not reflect those who were not counted or did not want to identify themselves as Native American. Some American Indians are suspicious of government representatives. In the past, some Native communities did not allow census workers to complete their surveys, and independent researchers have concluded that Native Americans were undercounted in 1960 and 1970.

In 2000, the indigenous population of Canada, which was growing at twice the rate of the Canadian population overall, accounted for about 3 percent of all Canadians—nearly a million people. Because Native peoples in Mesoamerica and South America don’t have the same kinds of relationships with their governments that tribes in the United States have, population statistics about indigenous groups can be calculated only approximately. The best estimates suggest that about 50 million people (about 10 percent of the total population) in Latin American identify themselves as indigenous.

Adapted from Do All Indians Live in Tipis? Questions & Answers from the National Museum of the American Indian. Published by the National Museum of the American Indian in association with HarperCollins. © 2007 Smithsonian Institution. (The book is available nationwide, at the NMAI stores in New York and Washington, DC, or at the NMAI’s online bookshop. Visit www.AmericanIndian.si.edu and click on Bookshop.)

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the ten cities in the United States with the largest American Indian/Alaska Native populations are:

- New York, New York – 90,000
- Los Angeles, California – 53,092
- Phoenix, Arizona – 35,093
- Tulsa, Oklahoma – 30,277
- Oklahoma City, Oklahoma – 29,000
- Anchorage, Alaska – 26,995
- Albuquerque, New Mexico – 22,047
3) What is a tribe and how many are there?

A tribe is a group of people made up of families who share a common ancestry and culture. They are socially and politically organized, often based on kinship structures. In the United States there are more than 560 American Indian tribes recognized by the federal government. There are hundreds of other tribes and communities that are recognized by the states in which they reside. A tribe may refer to itself as a nation, village, band, pueblo, or community, and it is important to remember that each group has a word or phrase in its own language that identifies it. For instance, people from the Navajo Nation often refer to their tribe as Diné. Although it can sometimes be difficult not to generalize about American Indian people, we encourage you always to be clear with your students about when you are making generalizations.

Background Information about the Ten Cultures Featured in the Culture Quest Activity

Kwakwa’wakw

- Kwakwa’wakw is the name for all of the people who speak the Kwak’wala language. They live on Vancouver Island and the adjoining mainland of British Columbia, Canada. Today there are thirteen different Kwakwa’wakw tribes comprising around 5,500 people.
- A potlatch is a celebration that can take many forms, but usually the hosts invite a large group, provide an abundant feast, and give each participant gifts. The more the hosts give away, the more honor they bring to themselves. In the 1880s, Canadian church and government officials considered the potlatch a negative influence that encouraged wastefulness, so the potlatch was outlawed in Canada from the 1880s to the 1950s. Although potlatches were still held in many communities during the ban, the tradition suffered a decline. Today Native communities along the North Pacific Coast have revived potlatches, seeing them as an integral connection to their ancestors.
potlatch ban, creating works for both commercial and cultural purposes. Many Kwakw̱a´wakw artists began creating masks and other works for sale to museums and collectors at this time. Communities held potlatch ceremonies either in secret or disguised as cultural demonstrations for the public, an activity that the government encouraged. Willie Seaweed’s leadership as a chief and creativity as an artist helped sustain the Kwakw̱a´wakw culture during a time of government prohibitions.

Apsáalooke

- The word Apsáalooke means 'children of the large-beaked bird,' which was misinterpreted to mean 'crow' in English. The Apsáalooke still use the name Crow today to refer to their reservation, language, and yearly celebrations. They are also sometimes referred to as Apsáalooke, meaning 'bird-people.'
- Today the Crow Reservation is located in south-central Montana. About 8,000 people reside on the Crow Reservation, and more than 11,000 people nationwide identify as Apsáalooke. On the reservation, about 85 percent of the people speak Crow as their first language.
- Every year the Crow Reservation hosts what has become the largest Native American cultural event in the country. The Crow Fair, or Baásaaxpilue, meaning “to make much noise,” is held on the third weekend in August. About 45,000 people from around the world attend the festivities. Some of the events at the Crow Fair are dance and song competitions, a rodeo, an arts and crafts fair, and a parade. The parade and dances allow different Native nations to display their craftsmanship and traditional clothing.
- Historically, warriors of the Plains nations defended themselves against rival tribes, Europeans, or American soldiers, and valor in warfare was highly valued. The ultimate goal in many of these altercations more often was to humiliate the enemy rather than to kill them. The highest honors were granted to warriors who risked their lives to “count coup” [pronounced koo]. Coup is a French word, meaning “stroke” or “blow,” that was used to describe touching an enemy in war. Warriors were able to increase their status in the tribe by counting coup, and the different deeds were ranked according the prestige they brought upon the warrior who performed them. Striking an enemy, for instance, was considered a higher achievement than killing him, because gaining honor was considered more important than taking life. Coups were described during ceremonies held upon returning to camp, and the feats were signified by markers such as feathers, painted symbols on horses’ flanks, beaded or quillwork strips on war shirts, or pictographs painted on buffalo robes and tipis.
- Among the Apsáalooke, four different deeds were necessary to become a chief: 1) touching a living enemy soldier (“counting coup”); 2) disarming an enemy; 3) leading a successful war party; and 4) stealing an enemy horse. Joe Medicine Crow is the last member of the Apsáalooke to become a traditional war chief. He achieved all four war deeds during his service in World War II.

Inuit

- Inuit means “the people” in the Inuktitut language. The Inuit reside in the Arctic regions of
Alaska, in the Canadian provinces of Quebec and Newfoundland, and in the Canadian territory of Nunavut. Today there are more than 100,000 Inuit living in North America. The word igloo or iglu means “house” in Inuktitut. While people often think that all Inuit live in igloos made of snow or ice, these kinds of houses were only built in western and central Canada, and they are hardly used anymore. The Inuit today live in houses and apartments made of contemporary materials such as wood and concrete.

- In the past, the Inuit hunted for the many animals that live in the Arctic Circle, including whales, seals, walruses, and caribou. Hunting and processing these animals for meat and hides required great strength and special skills, so the Inuit created games and competitions to help train young people for these important tasks. These games are still played today, and every year hundreds of Inuit and people of other indigenous Arctic nations travel to Fairbanks, Alaska, to compete in a variety of events based on cultural traditions. This competition is called the World Eskimo-Indian Olympics, and it includes contests in dancing as well as individual and team sports.

- Whaling was necessary among the peoples of the Arctic and Subarctic, who for centuries have hunted beluga and bowhead whales for their meat, blubber, and baleen. Europeans began whaling in the Arctic regions of North America as far back as the sixteenth century; by the mid-1800s commercial whaling was a major enterprise. European whalers were interested mainly in whale oil, which was used for fuel, soap, cosmetics, and as a lubricant for industrial machinery. Indigenous inhabitants of the Hudson Bay area and other Arctic coasts often interacted and traded with European whalers, and some were even employed on whaling ships, but by the mid-1900s the whale population was decimated, and indigenous whaling communities were suffering. Today, commercial whaling is strictly regulated in North America. Indigenous Arctic nations, however, have been allowed to continue subsistence whaling, since it has been an integral part of their cultures for centuries.

Founded in 1670 by a British royal charter, the Hudson’s Bay Company is one of the oldest commercial corporations in the world. The company was founded as a trade outpost to which indigenous hunters would bring large amounts of fur and hides to sell and trade for items—such as tea, tobacco, firearms, ammunition, glass beads, silver coins, textiles, and wood—that were otherwise unavailable to them.

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### Anishinaabe

- The term *Anishinaabe* refers to a group of peoples who live in the Great Lakes region of the United States and Canada and who speak similar languages. They include the Ojibwe, Odawa, Nipissing, Mississauga, Potawatomi, and Oji-Cree. These nations live in Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, Montana, and the Canadian provinces of Ontario, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan on more than a hundred reservations, reserves (the Canadian word for reservation), and communities. Currently, approximately 200,000 people identify themselves as Anishinaabe.

- The eighteenth century in North America was a time of extreme intercultural exchange, both hostile and peaceful. The formation of the United States of America in 1776 led to much contention, not only between the Americans and British but also among the various Indian
nations with which these foreign powers wished to forge alliances. British forts such as Michilimackinac served as trading posts and centers of commerce. Fort Michilimackinac’s position at the juncture of Lakes Huron and Michigan made it a valuable strategic center as well. Located in Anishinaabe territory, the British used their valuable imported trade goods to garner favor among the Anishinaabe and other Indian nations. The British could offer muskets, metal tools, bolts of fabric, blankets, and precious metals in exchange for the furs, hides, and food that the Anishinaabe had readily available. Both the British and the Anishinaabe understood that their alliance could prevent the encroachment of the Americans onto their land.

Chumash

- The Chumash live on the coast of California from Malibu Creek in Los Angeles County to San Carpojo Creek in San Luis Obispo County. Nearly 5,000 people identify themselves as Chumash today. The Chumash language is called Samala, but until recently there were no Chumash left who could speak it. Because of detailed studies and records of Samala that were done in the past, however, the Chumash now have a dictionary of their language and can take classes to learn to speak, read, and write it.
- Another tradition that the Chumash have revived is the use of the tomol. A tomol is a boat that the Chumash have used to navigate the waterways among the islands off the coast of southern California for the past two thousand years. Tomols range from eight to thirty feet long and are made of redwood planks that are held together with tar and pine pitch (the sticky sap of the pine tree). Tomols had fallen out of use for many years until, in 1976, the first modern tomol was built and launched in a ceremonial crossing. It has become a yearly tradition since 2001 to hold a tomol crossing from the Santa Barbara coast to the Channel Islands, a trip that takes paddlers about eight hours. Attended by many Chumash and other visitors, the event ends with a great feast and celebration on Santa Cruz Island, where the largest Chumash village used to stand.
- Basketmaking has been a tradition among the Chumash for centuries. The coastal plains provide an ideal habitat for the basket rush, or juncus, the plant most often used. Baskets were originally created for storage purposes, for transporting materials, and for food processing. Some were woven so tightly that they could hold water. Designs could be woven into the baskets using dyed strips of juncus.

During the Mission Period (1772–1834) Spanish Franciscan missionaries interacted extensively with the Chumash, introducing them to new foods, livestock, and metals, while seeking to convert them to Catholicism. A total of twenty-one missions were built in California during this era. Chumash women began to incorporate into their basket designs new imagery to which they had been exposed, particularly the designs found on silver coins that the Spanish minted locally. It became common for women to weave baskets specifically to sell or trade with Europeans, and this new income helped them to support their families. Basketmaking is still prevalent among the Chumash, who still use juncus as their preferred material. Contemporary basket-makers use traditional methods but draw their inspiration from both traditional and modern influences.

Mapuche
Mapuche means “people of the land” in Mapu-Dugun, the language spoken by the Mapuche people. Most Mapuches live in Chile, where they make up about 10 percent of the population—around one million people. Many other Mapuches live in Argentina. This region of South America is known as the Southern Cone.

The Mapuche have been living in the same region for hundreds of years. They were able to stand up to both Native and European invaders so that they could remain independent in their homeland. For as long as they have lived in the Southern Cone region, the Mapuche have depended on community and religious leaders called Machi for cultural and spiritual guidance. During ceremonies, the Machi beats a drum called a kultrung, which in its shape and painted decoration represents the cultural and spiritual beliefs of the Mapuche.

Quechua

- Quechua is the name of a language spoken by a group of people who live in the Andes, a mountain range that spans Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, southern Columbia, northern Chile, and northwest Argentina. The Inka were one of the earliest Quechua-speaking groups. They were master builders who created complex systems of roads and bridges as well as stone structures that are still in place today. Unlike builders today, the Inka used no mortar (cement) between individual stone blocks to hold their structures together. Mysteriously, these buildings are still standing more than a thousand years later.
- Today, more than nine million people speak Quechua in the Andean region of South America. Together with Spanish, it is the official language of Peru. Many Quechua-speakers still celebrate an ancient festival called Inti Raymi, or Festival of the Sun. The Inti Raymi takes place each year around June 21st, which is the winter solstice in the Southern Hemisphere and the start of the Quechua new year. Because the winter solstice is the shortest day of the year, the Inka chose to honor the sun at this time to ensure that it would return to warm the earth for their crops. Today, the Inti Raymi is a week-long celebration that includes dancing, singing, dramatic performances, and arts and crafts fairs.

Ancestral Puebloans

- Pueblo Bonito is the largest architectural structure within the large archaeological site of Chaco Canyon in northwestern New Mexico. According to archaeological evidence, Chaco Canyon was built around AD 900 and was inhabited until about AD 1130. The people that resided at Chaco Canyon were the Ancestral Puebloans, previously known as the Anasazi. The term Anasazi is the Navajo word for “ancient people” or “ancient enemies,” so it is no longer used out of respect for the contemporary Pueblo people, who are believed to be the descendants of the Ancestral Puebloans. Chaco Canyon was one of the largest settlements of Ancestral Puebloans, and it was a major trade center. Evidence at Chaco Canyon of cacao and macaw feathers from Mexico and sea shells from California attest to the extent of the trade routes that converged there.
- The Ancestral Puebloans inhabited the Four Corners region (southeast Utah, southwest
Colorado, northeast Arizona and northwest New Mexico) of the Southwest from about 1200 BC to AD 1200. Over time, they mastered practices of dry-land farming, pottery- and basketmaking, and building construction. It is believed that around AD 1200 Ancestral Puebloans migrated south to escape a long and widespread drought. They probably settled in and around New Mexico and Arizona, where they merged with other peoples living there. It is commonly thought that these new communities are the ancestors of contemporary Pueblo people. Today, there are twenty-one Pueblo communities. In New Mexico are Taos, Picuris, Nambe, Pojoaque, San Ildefonso, Tesuque, Ohkay Owingeh, Santa Clara, Jemez, Cochiti, Sandia, San Felipe, Santa Ana, Santo Domingo, Zia, Isleta, Acoma, Laguna, and Zuni pueblos. The Hopi live in Arizona, and the Tigua Pueblo is in Texas. There are about 55,000 people who identify as a member of one of the pueblos. The different Pueblo peoples speak a variety of languages including Keres (which has seven variations), Tiwa, Tewa, Towa, Zuni, and Hopi. In spite of these linguistic differences, all of the pueblos share a similar culture.

- Pottery has been a tradition in Pueblo cultures for more than a thousand years. Ancestral Puebloans first began to make coiled pottery around AD 500. Coiled pottery is created by taking long, thin rolls of clay and wrapping or coiling them into the desired shape. The coils are then smoothed together using a flat stone and a little bit of water. The invention of pottery revolutionized Ancestral Puebloan culture. With ceramic vessels, they were able to store excess food and water for use during meager times, they could cook more efficiently, and they had a new trade item to use in exchange for goods from the south and west. Almost all of this ancient pottery is decorated with ornate geometric designs, signifying its cultural importance. The coiling technique has remained a tradition among the Pueblo people, both for utilitarian purposes and as an art form. Contemporary artists create pots in all shapes and sizes and often decorate them with designs inspired by those on traditional Pueblo and Ancestral Puebloan pots. Pueblo pottery is greatly valued today by collectors all over the world, who travel in great numbers to Santa Fe, New Mexico, to buy these beautiful works of art.

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Maya

- With a population of about five million in Mexico, Honduras, Belize, El Salvador, and Guatemala, the Maya speak more than twenty different languages, with many speaking Spanish as a second language. In Guatemala, the Maya constitute about half of the country’s population.
- The Mesoamerican ballgame was the first game ever played with rubber balls, and it was invented thousands of years ago. Along with other games, it was played among the Olmec—whose civilization flourished in Mesoamerica between 1700 BC and AD 400—and among the Aztec, the Maya, and other indigenous peoples of the region.

It is known that Mesoamerican ball game was played among nobles, though not necessarily rulers, and it may have been associated with a sacred ball game believed to have been played between underworld gods at the time of the world’s creation. Though the rules of the game are not well understood, it is thought that the object was for the player to hit a rubber ball, which weighed up to nine pounds, with his hips or buttocks into the opposing team’s end zone or into one of the stone or wooden hoops that protruded from the sides of the courts. The game was so important that remnants of hundreds of ball courts have been found from Bolivia to Arizona,
and in parts of the Caribbean.

For ancient Mesoamericans, the ball game was not merely a game by contemporary definitions, but rather a sacred rite practiced to maintain cosmic balance between life and death. It had symbolic associations with celestial movements—particularly those of the sun and moon—and with agricultural fertility. In addition, it served as a method of conflict resolution within and between communities.

Rubber was a significant invention of the indigenous peoples of the Americas. The Olmec—who were even known as the Rubber People by other tribes—were the first people in the world to produce rubber from latex, a sap that comes from the *Hevea brasiliensis*, or rubber tree, found in Mesoamerica and along the Amazon River in South America. Latex was collected from the rubber trees, cleaned, and then cured with smoke from a fire made with palm nuts. After latex was mixed with sulfur, the naturally bad odor of the latex disappeared, its stickiness was eliminated, and the final product became like the rubber we know today: hardy and impervious to moisture.

Shipibo

- Shipibo is the word for both the Shipibo people and their language. The Shipibo live in more than a hundred small communities and villages along the Ucayali River in Peru's Amazon rainforest. The total Shipibo population is estimated to be more than 20,000, but this number is only approximate because many Shipibo live in very remote areas and remain relatively isolated from other Peruvians.
- While many Shipibo continue to live in settlements along the Ucayali River, more and more of them are moving into cities, where they can make money selling their traditional arts and crafts. This income allows them to pay for the food, medicine, and education that they are unable to obtain in their own communities. In spite of the many changes that the Shipibo have had to make in their daily lives, they maintain a very strong cultural identity. To do this, Shipibo communities have found new ways to communicate, including a Shipibo website and a radio station that broadcasts in the Shipibo language.

Background Information about the Ten Headresses

Assiniboine Antelope Horn Headdress

The Assiniboine refer to themselves as Nakota. They are a Great Plains nation who lived in Montana, North Dakota, and in the present-day Canadian provinces of Manitoba, Alberta, and Saskatchewan. Today, most Assiniboine live on or near their reserve in Saskatchewan.

This headdress features a set of pronghorn, or antelope horns. Among Plains warriors, wearing a
headdress adorned with animal horns usually symbolizes great courage, strong leadership skills, or military prowess. This headdress was probably worn by a highly respected Assiniboine man. Buffalo horns and deer antlers were also sometimes used on headdresses to signify the wearer’s status.

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**Miccusukee Seminole Turban**

The Seminole people lived in Florida until the mid 1800s, when many were forced to move onto reservations in Oklahoma. Today, most Seminole live in Oklahoma, but there is still a large community of Seminole Indians in Florida. The Miccosukee are very closely related to the Seminole—the two tribes have many cultural similarities.

Male Seminole and Miccosukee elders and leaders sometimes wear cotton turbans with silver bands and ostrich feathers during cultural and religious ceremonies such as the Green Corn Dance. The Green Corn Dance is the most important Seminole religious ceremony. It is held to honor the first sprouts of corn as they appear in the spring. Turbans such as this one are worn mainly among Florida Seminoles and Miccosukees.

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**Yup’ik Hunting Hat**

The Yup’ik live mainly in Alaska, with a few small communities in northern Canada and far-eastern Russia. In the past, they relied for survival on hunting Arctic mammals such as whales, caribou, and walruses.

The Yup’ik believe that in order to be successful hunters, they must form a respectful relationship with the animals that they are hunting. A hunter would wear a hat like this while hunting in his kayak. The animals depicted on this hat are whales and a seal, so by honoring these animals, the hunter hoped to be able to attract them. The wooden hat is decorated with walrus ivory and baleen, a bony substance found in the mouths of certain whales. These two animals are very important to Yup’ik culture and appear often in the art of this region.

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**Tiwanaku Four-Cornered Hat**

Tiwanaku is an ancient society that was active from around 300 BC to AD 1000. The Tiwanaku lived in what is now Peru and Bolivia, and they built a great city, also called Tiwanaku, near Lake Titicaca in Bolivia. This city is now an archaeological site, but it is still culturally important to the Aymara, who live nearby and consider the Tiwanaku people to be their ancestors.

Four-cornered hats such as these were woven with alpaca wool. Native to South America, alpacas are smaller cousins of camels and llamas. They are prized for their very soft wool. Four-cornered hats would have been worn by important men in the society, which is evidenced by the numerous sculptures of warriors wearing four-cornered hats that have been found at the ancient city of Tiwanaku.
Mebêngôkre *Krokrokti* (feather headdress or cape)

The Mebêngôkre, who are also known as Kayapó, live in small villages throughout the grassy highlands of Brazil, south of the Amazon rainforest. They often travel into the rainforest itself to hunt.

Feather headdresses and capes are often worn during ceremonies and celebrations. This *krokrokti* would have been worn on a man’s or woman’s back during a child’s naming ceremony. Naming ceremonies are held as children enter their adult lives and prepare to take on adult responsibilities in Mebêngôkre society.

Yoeme Deer Dance Headdress

The Yoeme live mainly in the Sonora province of Mexico. There is also a small population in Arizona who are known as the Pascua Yaqui Tribe. The Yaqui is a river in Sonora that runs through the Yoeme homeland.

One of the best known Yoeme ceremonies is the Deer Dance, which is a dance that honors the deer. The Yoeme hope that, by showing their respect for the animal, they will have success in hunting. Male deer dancers wear leg and ankle rattles made from dried moth cocoons and hold gourd rattles in their hands. The movements of the dance mimic the movements of a deer in the wild.

Karuk Headdress

The Karuk live in Northern California, which has been their homeland for centuries. Their environment has many forests and mountains.

This headdress is worn by men during the Jump Dance, which is held every two years to pray for plentiful deer, salmon, and other foods, and to help restore balance to the world. The Jump Dance is the third in a series of three dances meant to remove evil from the universe and replace it with good will.

Kuna *Kantule* Hat

The Kuna live in present-day Panama and Colombia. There are three large Kuna reservations in Panama, as well as small communities in Panama City and Colombia.

The *kantule* hat, worn by men known as *kantules*, or flute men, has been used for centuries by the Kuna for girls’ coming-of-age celebrations. There are two kantules at these ceremonies, and it is their responsibility to lead the celebration for three to five days.
Mapuche Head Ornament

Most Mapuches—around a million people—live in Chile, where they make up about 10 percent of the population. Many other Mapuches live in Argentina. This region has been their homeland for centuries.

This ostrich-feather head ornament is worn by young men who are chosen by the machi, or religious leader, to dance while the machi performs certain ceremonies for healing or renewal.

Haida Frontlet Headdress

The Haida people live along the northwest coast of North America in northern Canada and southern Alaska. Their masks and headdresses often portray animals that are important to their culture, such as ravens, bears, killer whales, or beavers.

A frontlet is a headdress that is worn above the forehead. Haida chiefs and other important Haida men and women often wear frontlets as a sign of their authority at community celebrations and ceremonies, which usually include dancing. Frontlets are often decorated with pieces of shiny seashell called abalone, which catch and reflect light while the wearer is dancing.

Background Information About Meet the Artist

Larry Beck (1938–1994)

Larry Beck was born in Seattle, Washington, to a Yup’ik mother and a European American father. He attended the University of Washington, where he earned a B.A. in painting and an M.A. in sculpture. He also taught art at the University of Oregon. His in-depth training and formal skills earned him nationwide renown.

In the beginning his art career, Beck traveled to his mother’s family’s village in Alaska, where he studied the art of the Yup’ik people. Inspired by the subject matter and form of Yup’ik art, especially masks, he began to incorporate Yup’ik stylistic elements into his own work.

Yup’ik art often features whales, walruses, seals, and other marine animals that are important to the Yup’ik. These animals are also represented in masks that are worn during dances and ceremonies. Larry Beck borrowed the concept of creating animal masks, but he used materials and found objects that he gathered locally—such as scrap metal, old car parts, and scraps of wood—to make his art. Beck combined traditional Yup’ik ideas with innovations of his own to create works of art that represented him as both an American Indian and an artist.
Diego Romero (1964–)

Diego Romero was born in Berkeley, California. His father is from Cochiti Pueblo in New Mexico, where Romero spent his childhood summers; his mother is European American. Romero attended an Indian art school as well as UCLA, and the diversity of his background and education is reflected in his art.

Pottery is Diego Romero’s medium of choice; making pottery is also an ancient tradition among both Pueblo Indians and Europeans. Romero’s pottery appropriates elements from each of these traditions: like ancient Greek potters, he tells stories with images painted on the pots; like his Pueblo ancestors, he uses linear and geometric designs. Romero invents some of the subjects in his work, but he also incorporates Pueblo mythology into some of the pots. Many of the scenes depicted on his pots address issues that Southwestern American Indian communities face today: poverty, poor health care, single parenthood, and young people losing interest in their cultures.

Bently Spang (1960–)

Bently Spang is a Northern Cheyenne artist who was born in Montana. He has been in close contact with Cheyenne culture throughout his life, and Cheyenne material culture is a recurring theme in his art. Spang attended the University of Wisconsin, where he met and was influenced by other American Indian artists such as Bert Benally (Diné), with whom he has collaborated on large-scale installations.

The purpose of much of Bently Spang’s work is to show that American Indians are contemporary people, who continue to evolve, and that their cultures are still alive and active—not extinct, as many people think. He uses traditional Cheyenne motifs as a basis for many of his pieces, but he adds modern flair by including found objects, bronze, aluminum, and sometimes even music and video. The message behind his art is usually serious, but, more often not, it’s presented in a humorous way.

Allan Houser (1914–1994)

Allan Houser was born Allan C. Haozous on a farm in an Apache community in Oklahoma. His parents were both Chiricahua Apaches who were born in captivity in the late 1800s because their own parents refused to move to reservations in Arizona. They were released in 1914, and Allan Houser was born a few months later. He was the first in the community to be born out of captivity. When Houser was young, American Indians often were treated with hostility, so he changed his name in an attempt to blend into American society.

Houser began his art career as a painter after attending the Painting Studio at the Santa Fe Indian School. He began sculpting later in his career, when he and his family moved to Los Angeles. At international museum exhibitions that came to Los Angeles, he first saw the work of the great European sculptors. Houser’s sculptures are usually recognizable as American Indians, whom he portrays as proud people.
Bob Haozous (1943– )

Bob Haozous was born in Los Angeles, California. His father was the well-known Chiricahua Apache artist Allan Houser; his mother was Navajo. Haozous followed in his father’s footsteps and has become a successful sculptor, but the similarities between the two end there. Unlike his father, Haozous studied sculpture at a large public art school. Haozous’s work focuses on the need for American Indians to embrace their native cultures while at the same time growing and changing as part of American culture. He recognizes that many Indians today forget their heritage in favor of blending in. Because of this, he changed his name from Houser back to Haozous in an attempt to return to his heritage.

Bob Haozous works mainly as a sculptor, creating often-controversial images of Apaches and other American Indians who have become separated from their cultures. Like his father, Haozous has, exhibited his art around the world.

Ideas for Classroom Discussion

When teaching about Native Americans, you can conduct many fun and educational hands-on activities in your classroom. Please be mindful that there are a few dos and don’ts when teaching about Native peoples. Below are some “rules of the road” as well as suggested activities that will reinforce the lessons addressed in this website.

DOS

We encourage educators to absorb the following information and highlight it in classroom discussions:

- To help kids understand that each Native group is distinct, talk about how diversity is based on the places where we live. The places and the resources different people have access to all play a part in what makes us different from one another. Talk to your students about the different animals that live in various parts of the country, as well as how climates vary from place to place. This will help them understand that not everyone is the same.
- State that there is no one “Indian” language or way of thinking.
- Inform students that indigenous communities in the Western Hemisphere number in the thousands. Each community or tribe is unique. While there are often similarities between groups, tribes can also be as different from each other as people from Japan and Germany.
- Emphasize the fact that the Americas’ indigenous cultures are living cultures.

DON’TS

Please be mindful of the following when doing hands-on activities or holding classroom discussions:
We kindly ask that you not have students make masks or headdresses. As you will learn in this site, headdresses and masks are worn by Native people who have particular abilities, have achieved specific cultural goals, or possess cultural knowledge. Some masks and headdresses can be worn only by men or only by women. The right to wear these often comes with specific, associated conventions. Wearers must know the proper ways of caring for a mask or headdress. In some Native American nations, masks are sacred and are considered living beings that must be properly nourished. Masks and headdresses are not for “dress up” occasions, such as Halloween; Native people wear them only at specific times. When not wearing their regalia, Native people dress in jeans and other everyday clothes. There are few Native communities in which children are permitted to wear headdresses or masks.

Please do not have students dress up as Indians or use the term “costume” when describing Native American clothing. Native people prefer the terms “regalia” or “outfits” to describe their clothing. Costume implies that Native people dress up as one would for Halloween when, in fact, there are specific protocols for how Native people dress for special occasions, which include powwows, ceremonies, and social occasions.

Please do not give students “Indian” names or assign them to “tribes.” Just as students should not impersonate members of other ethnicities, they should not learn about Native identity by assuming a made-up Native name or becoming part of a fictitious Native group. Most Native peoples’ names are translations from different languages (i.e., Sitting Bull is a translation of Tatanka Iyotake, from Lakota, his Native tongue). Sometimes a community’s spiritual leaders give Native individuals a name that reflects that person’s unique qualities. These names are given following specific cultural protocols.

Please refer to Native people in the present tense. Unfortunately, many books describe American Indians only as living in the past, ignoring the thriving Native presence in the Western Hemisphere today.

Please do not use phrases like “sit Indian style,” “Indian giver,” or “have a powwow.” Please do not tell students that they’re “acting like a bunch of wild Indians.” Be mindful of misused and misunderstood terms like “brave,” “chief,” or “squaw.”

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

1) Buffalo Robe–Using the template have students tell a story about something they achieved that brought them honor. Have them write a short essay about the meaning of the drawings. Have students describe their good deeds.

2) Using Diego Romero’s work as an influence, have students design their own bowl. The designs with which the students decorate their pots could reflect their region’s environment and an animal that has personal or cultural meaning for them.

3) Using the Quechua gourd as inspiration, have students create their own “round book.” Create a ball from paper mache or another medium. The students can research and illustrate an historic event, or they can draw a recent occurrence. Have them write an essay to go with their illustrated book.

4) Have students look at the Shipibo effigy vessel. Students can create their own effigy pot using clay or another medium. They can paint their vessel with designs common in their own surroundings.
5) Using Bently Spang’s work as inspiration, have students create an item of clothing by sewing or taping together images (photographs, cut-outs from magazines, drawings). Images can reflect their own environment, including people or places they know. The item of clothing does not have to be wearable but should be identifiable as a shirt, dress, skirt, pants, etc.

6) Make a recipe from the museum’s *Mitsitam Cafe Cookbook*. Have students research the origins of the recipe’s ingredients and the region where the recipe originated. (The book is available nationwide, at the NMAI stores in New York and Washington, DC, or at the NMAI’s online bookshop. Visit www.AmericanIndian.si.edu and click on Bookshop.)

7) Using Larry Beck’s work as inspiration, have students create a work of art from found objects. The object students create should represent something familiar to them, in the same way that Larry Beck made a walrus mask, something that was widely used among the Yup’ik people from whom he was descended, from chair legs, hubcaps and rivets. The goal of this activity is to repurpose materials.