



*American Indian Unit*



Eastern Woodlands region

# Unit Introduction

units but will focus on Eastern Woodland American Indian culture. Some new lessons are found only in this American Indian Unit that relate to Trades, Leisure and Domestic Arts. Additional activities are mentioned from the American Indian and Multicultural Connections.

## Student Learning Outcomes

Students will understand the lifestyle of Eastern Woodland Indians.

Students will understand the cultural contributions to modern society by American Indians.

Students will understand the arts and domestic skills of the American Indians.

## Differentiated Instruction

As needed, exceptional students will be paired to facilitate activity successes.

As needed, gifted students will use extended resource lists for additional challenges.

## American Indians

Since the discovery of land in his search for a quicker route from Europe (Spain) to India in search of spices, Christopher Columbus named the indigenous peoples he met “Indians.” They have since come to be known as Indians even though that was not a correct assumption. It was not India, but was a previously unknown land later to be known as America on the continent of North America, which Columbus discovered.

In addition to their tribal names, Indians have been consistently referred to as American Indians or just Indians; however, there is evidence of a decisive vote on their tribal preferences. The Smithsonian Institute established the National Museum of the American Indian in 1989 upon an Act of Congress. Ultimately the museums were established in three locations: Washington, D.C., New York City, and in Suitland, Maryland. The Smithsonian subsequently conducted surveys of American Indians. Most of the surveys were returned preferring the term “American Indian” over “Native American”. Today, either term is acceptable for usage and is not considered offensive.

## Eastern Woodlands region

This Unit will focus on the historic involvement in settlement life that has been presented in other

### Unit Guiding Questions

Why were native people called American Indians?

How did Eastern Woodland Indians live?

How did they construct shelter?

What did daily life look like for American Indians?

In what ways did American Indian life differ from the lives of the settlers?

## UNIT PRE-VISIT SUGGESTIONS

Read the introductory units on Folk Art and Pricketts Fort history with particular focus on the section on “Indians in Western Virginia.”

Examine the maps to understand the geographic boundaries of the frontier and the colonies in the late 1700s and the states in the late 1800s.

### Works Cited & Resources

Wilbur, C. W. Indian Handcrafts. Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press, 1990.

Wilbur, C. W. The Woodland Indians. Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press, 1995.

“National Museum of the American Indian”  
[www.nmai.ai.edu](http://www.nmai.ai.edu)

Joe Candillo, tribal member of the Pascua Yaqui of Arizona, personal conversation.

## VISIT

Visit activities are outlined in the individual lessons.

## UNIT POST-VISIT SUGGESTIONS

Find a contemporary account of American Indian festivals or gatherings in one of the lesson areas.

Research and write a profile of the modern Indian versus the colonial-era Indians.

Interview an American Indian and share the results with the class. Create a visual presentation about the American Indians that has been researched as an exhibit, video or art form.

# Background

## Indians in Western Virginia

Pricketts Fort was never directly attacked by Indians and written documentation of any interactions between people living on the grounds of the fort and American Indians is sparse. Many historians believe that around the 1600s to 1800s the area that encompasses modern-day West Virginia was a hunting ground for Eastern Woodland Indians such as the Shawnees and Delaware. Since hunting and gathering were activities by which American Indians sustained their lives, they considered West Virginia their home. Testimonies from the earliest traders and settlers in the region make clear that there were small Indian settlements scattered here and there throughout the region in the first half of the 18th century. It is well known that there were extensive trade relationships between the Indians of the Ohio River Valley and the European frontier settlers during the 18th and early 19th centuries.

Between the 1700s and 1800s, the Ohio River Valley was alive with interactions between Woodland peoples and European settlers. During this time, many treaties were made and wars were fought. Many times, land ownership was at the root of these confrontations between cultures. Documented evidence suggests that some of the primary Indian inhabitants of the middle Ohio River Valley during the 1700s and 1800s were people who spoke two general languages: Macro-Siouan, particularly Iroquoian languages, and Macro-Algonquian. These people can be traced to the ancestors of modern day Shawnee, Delaware, and Iroquois people. At the time of first contact, the indigenous people living in North America understood how to utilize their natural environment much more efficiently than the Europeans. Over time, many other differences between American Indians and Europeans became apparent. Concepts of land ownership, gender roles, religion, and methods of sustenance were the main differences that ultimately led to conflict between Europeans and Eastern Woodland Indians. After each conflict there were two major outcomes for Indian peoples, some became acculturated in the newly developing “American” society, while others left the middle Ohio River Valley.

While European Americans understood land ownership to be transferable by written record, American Indians understood that most land was available to anyone by exercising hunting and gathering privileges thereon. Native belief was that they were caretakers of the land, as it provided for them as set by the creator. The Shawnee as well as other Woodland tribes believed in a Creator and Supreme Being as well as spirits. For example, all things in nature were believed to have a spirit: some helpful, some harmful. There are also spirits that work for evil such as the “trickster.” Many oral

stories back up these beliefs. Prior to contact between the two major cultures, European cultures were male-oriented, with fathers as heads of households, owners of family property, vehicles of inheritance and officials in government. Most Eastern Woodland Indian cultures were female-centric with mothers as heads of households, owners of property, and vehicles of inheritance. Women served in governing bodies in Indian communities as well. Livestock was the primary provision for meat among European Americans while wild game provided the bulk of meat in American Indian diet. It is now more generally recognized that each of these major cultures was influenced by the other, especially on the frontier where proximity made interaction inevitable. Frontier European Americans adopted slash and burn agriculture with corn, beans, and squash as major garden vegetables. They also learned to hunt and trap from their American Indian neighbors. American Indians learned to raise livestock and some came to embrace monotheism.

Beyond these differences, diseases such as smallpox and tuberculosis were also working toward the demise of indigenous people. European disease is believed by many scholars to have contributed to the death of between 60 and 90% of all indigenous peoples throughout the Americas in the first two centuries of contact with Europeans.

From the very first interaction between American Indians and Europeans, ideas were being exchanged. Initially, the relationship between American Indians and Europeans was good. American Indians were responsible for helping Europeans adapt to and survive in the new North American environment, while Europeans provided American Indians with tools and other trade items that were far superior to their own. During the 1700s and 1800s, the culture of American Indians living in the Middle Ohio River Valley greatly changed due to a number of societal factors. One of these societal strains came as a result of the introduction to European trade goods. During this time, many American Indians lost their ability to live without European trade items. Although American Indian culture in general was still very different from that of the Europeans, there were many more similarities in the two groups’ material cultures than there had been at the time of first contact. By the early 1700s, many of the Eastern Woodland Indians had adopted European trade goods and were commonly using items such as trade cloth, iron hatchets, and copper cooking utensils. Although the introduction to these new trade items created a new material culture for these people, some of the traditionally “Indian” material culture remained the same.