

LAND AND NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURES

A Resource Guide for Teachers

Readings, Activities, and Sources

Grades 9-12

The Smithsonian Institution

Center for Folklife Programs

& Cultural Studies

Washington, D.C.

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Readings, Activities, and Sources

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Special thanks to Theresa Lomakema and Lee Jenkins of the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office, the staff of the Ketchikan Museums, especially Jeanne Gerulskis and Winona Wallace, and Jym Wilson for their assistance in the preparation of these materials. Thanks to Karin Hayes for her translation of "Nunkui."

This project has been made possible with the support of the National Museum of the American Indian, the Smithsonian Educational Outreach Fund, and the Smithsonian Women's Committee.

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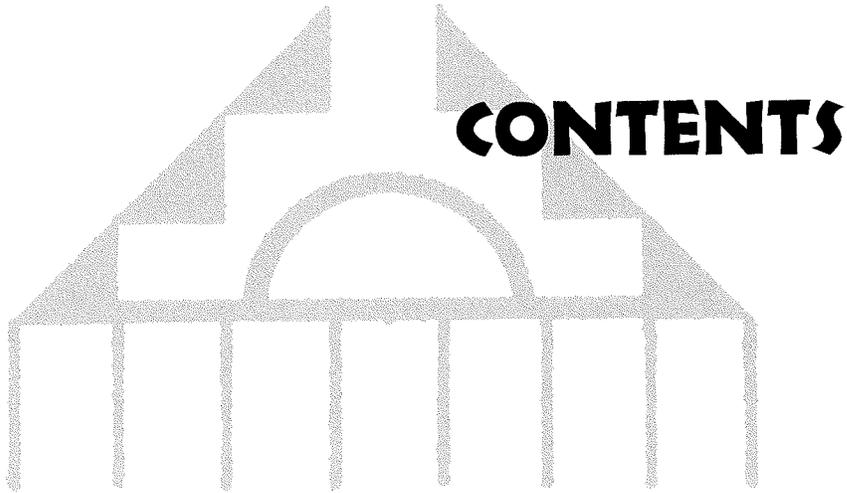
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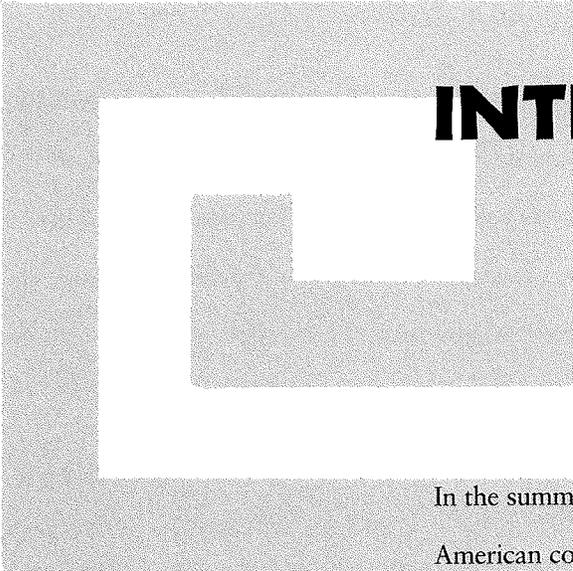
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INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 1991, seventy representatives of thirteen Native American communities gathered on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., to participate in the 1991 Festival of American Folklife. Sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution Center for Folklife Programs & Cultural Studies, the “Land in Native American Cultures” program at the Festival was one of several events held in connection with the 500th anniversary of Spanish contact with the lands and people of the Americas.

This Festival program was a celebration of the diversity and persistence of America’s First People. Traditional practitioners of subsistence activities, art, music, dance, narrative arts, healing, and foodways shared their knowledge with more than one million people. Festival-goers had the opportunity to hear from members of Native American societies that have persevered for more than 500 years since contact, maintaining traditional knowledge of the earth and of their cultures. Each group demonstrated subsistence practices uniquely suited to specific environments as well as artistic and spiritual traditions that underscore the group’s unique identity. Many participants in the 1991 “Land in Native American Cultures” program returned to Washington as participants in the “Culture and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean” program of the 1994 Festival of American Folklife.

Today, as in 1492, concepts of land shape the political, social, economic, and symbolic lives of Native Americans. Today, as in 1492, knowledge of the land as a sustainable resource and as a spiritual force

provides these groups with their greatest hope for economic self-determination and continuation of ancient traditions. For hundreds of years, this knowledge has been largely ignored or ridiculed by non-Native peoples. Now, as we are confronted by the dire condition of the earth's natural resources, and each of us is challenged to act on our responsibility to tend them, events such as the 1991 Festival of American Folklife program provide opportunities to learn to live as caretakers of the earth.

Development of educational materials from the rich information collected for and during the 1991 and 1994 Festival programs provides an opportunity for teachers and students to learn how Native cultures in North and South America have sustained themselves through unique partnerships with their environments for thousands of years. These materials feature cultural groups who came to the 1991 and 1994 Festivals from three geographic areas — the Hopi of northern Arizona; the Tlingit, Tsimshian, and Haida of Southeast Alaska; and the Aymara and Quechua of the Peruvian and Bolivian Andean regions. Informative essays, suggestions for teachers, student activities, and recommended resources provide materials for learning how these groups' intimate relationships with the land are manifested in subsistence practices, art, ritual and ceremony, and verbal arts.

These materials support four primary learning goals:

- to deepen students' understanding of Native American cultures and respect for cultural differences;
- to teach young people about traditional Native American relationships with the earth and its ecosystems;
- to teach young people about the importance of stewardship of the earth and its resources;
- to help students become skilled at observing, analyzing, and reporting the characteristics of cultural groups.

These goals are addressed through four instructional topics:

KNOWLEDGE OF THE LAND is a presentation of the concept of subsistence as it applies to the knowledge, practices, and values exhibited in the lives of several Native American groups from diverse geographic areas.

ART AND IDENTITY explores how knowledge of natural resources is applied to the unique art of each culture and investigates the practical, aesthetic, and spiritual roles of art and craft objects.

THE POWER OF STORIES demonstrates the role of stories and oratory in communicating and preserving cultural knowledge and values.

RITUAL AND CEREMONY explores the sources and functions of rituals and ceremonies, their connection to subsistence activities, and their role in communicating and preserving Native beliefs and values.

Presentation of each of these topics is organized in a format which includes a *Teacher Preparation* essay providing background information about the topic followed by *Suggested Activities* designed to actively involve students in exploring new concepts. *Focus Questions* for each topic are designed to help students direct their thinking as they are presented with new information. Then information for student use is provided. Teachers may assign these sections as student reading or adapt them for other forms of presentation, depending on the particular needs of students. These sections are interrupted with **TIME OUT** activities designed to give students opportunities to recall prior knowledge, reflect on what they have learned, and actively apply new information. A list of *Suggested Resources* can be found at the end of each unit of study.

This guide will be useful for teaching about specific cultures as well as introducing students to the various disciplines involved in observing and describing the traditions and beliefs that make each culture unique. Activities are designed to involve students as folklorists, historians, anthropologists, geographers, and practitioners of other

In preparing these materials, we have made every effort to treat each topic with respect and to honor each group's right to maintain the privacy of its sacred traditions. In their collections of Native American stories and nature activities, authors Michael J. Caduto and Joseph Bruchac include a list of suggestions for teaching about Native cultures with respect and appreciation. Some of their suggestions are:

♦ **Don't discuss Native American cultures as if they only existed in the past.**

♦ **Do discuss that Native Americans live in the modern world. They work at jobs, go to school, play sports, drive cars, and have family lives. Some live close to the traditional ways, and other are more immersed in modern culture.**

♦ **Don't speak as if Native Americans are only one large culture. Each group has its own language, customs, beliefs, and ways of living in the world.**

♦ **Don't belittle sacred ceremonies and beliefs by trying to imitate them. These are the heart and soul of Native cultures and are easily trivialized or misunderstood by mimicry.**

♦ **Do invite local Native people to visit with students and discuss their beliefs and ceremonies. Study Native ways objectively and as a lesson to be understood without being imitated and practiced. Encourage children to learn more about their own traditions and how their beliefs support our being close to, and caring toward, the earth and other people. In addition, please be sensitive to the sacred meanings of the visual symbols used by Native American cultures. Such symbols are "owned" by specific clans. Avoid using them for decorative or promotional purposes. Do help students become aware of the power of visual symbols in all cultures.**

Bibliographic information about the Caduto and Bruchac books can be found in the list of suggested resources at the back of this guide.

disciplines in the work of analyzing the ways cultural groups interact with their environments and use traditional knowledge.

We hope this guide will be a flexible resource for teachers. It is not intended to provide a complete curriculum for teaching Native American history or culture. Instead, it offers an introduction to aspects of the current lives of people whose knowledge is too often dismissed and whose practices and beliefs are too often viewed as relics of the past. Interdisciplinary teaching teams will find the guide useful for connecting social studies, language arts, and visual arts topics. Teachers of single-subject courses will find information and materials that will help them include Native American perspectives in environmental studies, geography, literature, art, and anthropology classes. It isn't necessary to use all of the materials and activities included in the guide. We hope they will be used to seed the development of Native American studies where none currently exist and to supplement those already underway.