

People lived in the United States long before the arrival of [Christopher Columbus](#) and the Europeans. These people and cultures are called Native Americans. This page is an overview of Native Americans who lived in the United States. More details can be found in the links at the bottom of the page.



Three Chiefs by Edward S. Curtis

Indigenous Peoples

The first people to live in a land are called indigenous peoples. This means they were the original settlers. The Native Americans are the indigenous peoples and cultures of the United States.

American Indians

Sometimes these peoples are referred to as Indians or American Indians. This is because when Columbus had first landed in America, he thought he had sailed all the way to the [country of India](#). He called the locals Indians and the name stuck for some time.

Where did they live?

Native Americans lived throughout North and South America. In the United States there were Native Americans in Alaska, Hawaii, and the mainland of the United States. Different tribes and cultures lived in different areas. In the middle of the country lived the Plains Indians, including tribes such as the Comanche and Arapaho. In the Southeast area of the country lived tribes such as the Cherokee and the Seminole.

Tribes

The Native Americans were grouped into tribes or nations usually based on the area they lived in and their culture such as their religion, customs, and language. Sometimes smaller tribes were part of a bigger tribe or nation. As best as historians can tell, these tribes were fairly peaceful prior to the arrival of Columbus and the Europeans.

There were hundreds of tribes throughout the United States when Columbus first arrived. Many of them are well known such as the Cherokee, Apache, and the Navajo. To learn more about these tribes, check out the links at the bottom of this page.

How do we know about their history?

The Native Americans did not write down or record their history, so we have to find out about their history in other ways. Today archeologists are able to learn a lot about past cultures by digging up artifacts such as tools and weapons. Much of what we know comes from the recordings of the first Europeans to arrive. We can also learn from traditions and stories that have been passed down within the tribes from generation to generation.

Native Americans Today

Today, some of the descendants of the original American Indians live on reservations. These are areas of land set aside specifically for Native Americans. This helps to protect their heritage and culture. However, only around 30% live on reservations. The rest live outside the reservations just like anyone else.

Recommended books and references:

- If You Lived with the Iroquois by Ellen Levine. 1998.
- Apache: American Indian Art and Culture by Heather Kisson and Jordan McGill. 2011.
- The Cherokee by Petra Press. 2002.
- Indians of the Great Plains: Traditions, History, Legends, and Life by Lisa Sita. 1997.
- Native Homes by Bobby Kalman. 2001.
- The Navajo Nation by Sandra M. Pasqua. 2000.