



EXPLORERS

Indigenous People's Heritage Month

Welcome to Book Explorers! It's like a book club for kids that you can do anytime, anywhere. This month we're talking about books by and about Indigenous people. Indigenous People's Heritage Month honors the culture and traditions as well as the long and powerful history of the first inhabitants of the United States. It's a celebration of the diversity and resilience of Indigenous nations and people.

Perspectives on Thanksgiving

Many Native American families today do not celebrate Thanksgiving. Instead, Native American families may remember that day as a reminder of the invasion of Colonial armies that took their lands and killed their ancestors. In Massachusetts, on the day that Thanksgiving is celebrated, some Native Americans hold a memorial service where the Mayflower landed. Many Native Americans consider the day that Thanksgiving is celebrated to be a National Day of Mourning.

In some schools, kids might dress up in costumes that are meant to represent "Indian" or Native American clothing. But dressing up in stereotypical clothing can be hurtful. Often, these outfits bear no resemblance to the clothes Native Americans wore at the time. For example, wearing feathers was not something everyone did. Wearing feathers was, and continues to be, deeply meaningful and is only done by those who have earned the right.

--Brian Johnson, Hampden Library

Native Cultural Tradition, Customs, Regalia, Clothing, Colors and Self-Expression



A Native child growing up in a traditional environment may express themselves and their culture by wearing clothing and accessories with significant colors and patterns. Clothing and accessories that are worn at powwows, dances and ceremonies are called regalia. Important materials in regalia have a long history. Native nations used what they had around them, such as flowers, medicine leaves (sweetgrass), animals for leather (porcupines, birds, elk, deer, buffalo, horsehair, eagles, hawks, birds and more). In the past, beads, thread and needles may have come from trading posts.



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Growing up in Native American cultures, kids learn the spiritual significance of colors and their connection to things in the earth, water, universe, seasons, and more.

East (Yellow) - “The direction from which the sun comes...On a deeper level, East stands for wisdom helping people live good lives.”

West (Black) - “To the west, the sun sets, and the day ends. For this reason, West signifies the end of life. The great Thunderbird lives in the west and sends thunder and rain from its direction. For this reason, the west is also the source of water: rain, lakes, streams and rivers. Nothing can live without water, so the west is vital.”

North (Red) - “North brings the cold, harsh winds of the winter season. These winds are cleansing. They cause the leaves to fall and the earth to rest under a blanket of snow. If someone has the ability to face these winds like the buffalo with its head into the storm, they have learned patience and endurance.”

South (White) - “Because the southern sky is when the sun is at its highest, this direction stands for warmth and growing.”

Source: St. Joseph's Indian School (<http://aktalakota.stjo.org>), adapted from Lakota Life by Ron Zellinger



There are 574 federally recognized tribes in the United States. Each has its own tribal culture, language, clothing, songs and dance. Culture is woven from family, tribal historical traditions, as well as the regions where their homelands are located and the places they were historically moved by the United States government.

If you wish to honor, respect or appreciate Native people's culture, learn how to listen to Native people.

--Carla Respects Nothing, Community Resources

Images: David Brown Eyes, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons

Activity

Think about an outfit or a part of your appearance that is meaningful to you, to your family, or to your culture. Is there an article of clothing or a way of doing your hair that is significant to you? Is there a color that has meaning for you?

What makes those things special? How do they make you feel?

Use your oil pastels to draw a picture of yourself wearing the clothing that you thought about.

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