

Name _____



The First Americans

By Sharon Fabian

When the first European settlers arrived in America, they found wide-open spaces. It looked like an abundance of free land, theirs for the taking. Soon, more and more settlers were crossing the Atlantic to take advantage of the free land.

Of course, America was not an unoccupied land; it had already been occupied for a long time. A very long time.

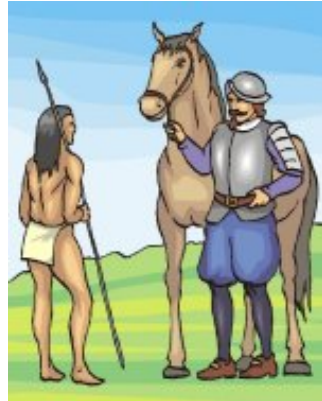
Tribes of Native Americans already inhabited the land that we now call America. Some estimates suggest that Native Americans have lived in America for 20,000 years. The estimates vary widely, but they all agree that the number is in the thousands of years.

The Native Americans had very different lifestyles and beliefs from the settlers.

One important difference was that they did not believe in the individual ownership of land. Individual people or families did not hold deeds to their own plot of land. Many Native Americans believed that the land was theirs to use but not to own. They believed that people should use the land wisely and respectfully and leave it in good condition for the future generations. Certain pieces of land held special significance to a particular tribe. To the members of the tribe, that land was sacred.

Another difference was that many Native Americans did not practice the settled-down farming lifestyle that many of the European settlers did. Some Indians were nomadic, following buffalo herds rather than living in one place. Others grew some crops but also hunted and gathered much of their food.

A third difference was that Europeans were used to putting things down in writing. Many Native Americans passed down their



important information and important legends through oral history.

One of the first Indian tribes that the settlers met in America was the Wampanoag Tribe. An agreement between the Wampanoag and the Plymouth settlers was one of the first treaties of its kind.

During colonial times, many tribes lived in the area that would become the thirteen colonies.

In the northeast, there were, among others, many members of the Iroquois Federation - the Mohawk, Onondaga, Oneida, Seneca, and Cayuga tribes.

In the Southeast some of the larger tribes were the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Natchez.

In the early colonial days, settlers often received help for the Native Americans. The Native Americans taught the newcomers that crops like corn, beans, and squash would grow well here. They traded food that the settlers could not provide for themselves for items that they wanted - like guns and certain tools.

Before long, relations between the Native Americans and the settlers became more troublesome. As more and more settlers arrived, they laid claim to more and more Indian land. Sometimes, they used their more advanced weapons to take the land by force. A whole series of conflicts, known as the Indian wars, was soon in progress. The Indian Wars would continue for many years.

The name "Indians" came from the time of Christopher Columbus, when he mistakenly thought he had discovered the West Indies and called the inhabitants Indians. Later, the terms Native Americans and First Americans, which were more accurate, came into use.

Those were not the names chosen by the tribes, however. The original names, each one in an original Native American language, often translated to something like "the people," or "the real people" in English. The real name of the Delaware Indians means "genuine people." The Wampanoag call themselves the "people of the first light."

By any name, these are the people who first lived in America. To the Native Americans, the rest of us must seem like we just arrived yesterday.



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Questions

- _____ 1. Native Americans have lived in America _____.
 - A. since colonial times
 - B. for thousands of years
 - C. since the 1800's
 - D. for 1000 years

- _____ 2. The name Indian came from _____.
 - A. a mistake by Columbus
 - B. a colonial word for "Native American"
 - C. a Wampanoag word
 - D. a Delaware Indian name

- _____ 3. The _____ tribe made a treaty with the Plymouth settlers.
 - A. Iroquois
 - B. Creek
 - C. Wampanoag
 - D. Delaware

- _____ 4. A major area of conflict between the Native Americans and the settlers was _____.
 - A. corn crops
 - B. land ownership
 - C. dress
 - D. none of the above

- _____ 5. Buffalo were especially important to the _____.
 - A. settlers
 - B. Native Americans
 - C. Europeans
 - D. Colonists

- _____ 6. The term Indian Wars refers to conflicts between _____.
 - A. Onondaga and Oneida
 - B. Native Americans and First Americans
 - C. Native Americans and settlers
 - D. Iroquois and Cherokee

- _____ 7. The settlers traded with the Native Americans to get _____.
 - A. guns
 - B. money
 - C. food
 - D. ships

- _____ 8. Many Native Americans passed down legends through _____.
 - A. stories that were memorized and repeated
 - B. secret codes that only the Native Americans knew
 - C. realistic novels
 - D. narrative poems

Many Native Americans believed in the importance of using but not abusing the land - leaving it in good condition for future generations. List some specific things that people can do to leave the land in good shape for future generations.
