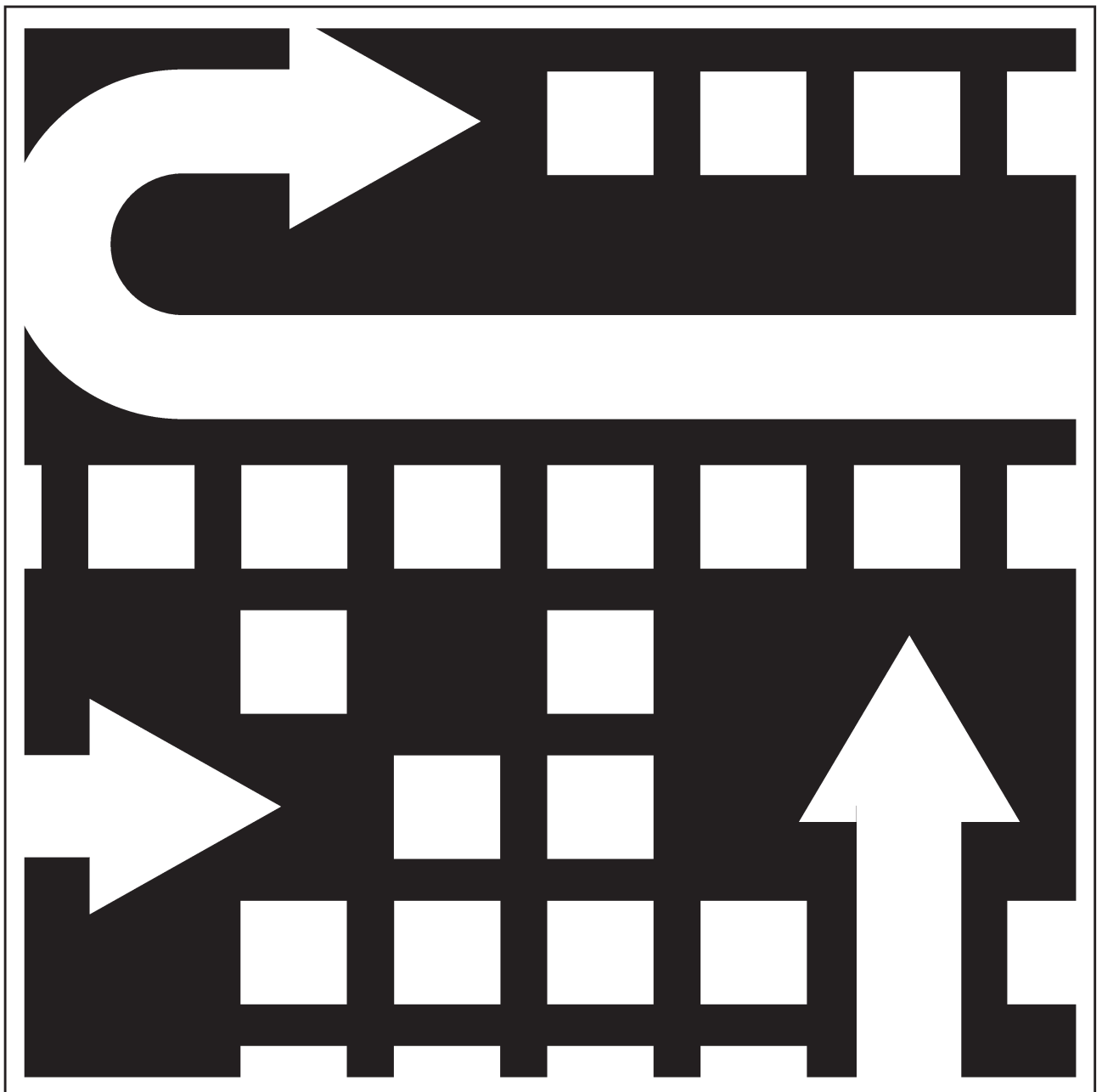


# FIRST AMERICANS ARRIVE

An early American history activator



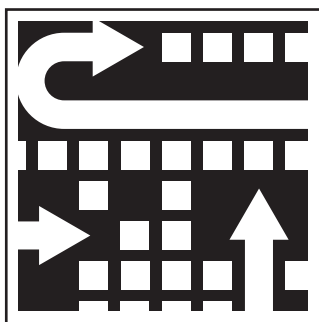
# FIRST AMERICANS ARRIVE

**An early American history activator**

BILL LACEY, who wrote all our 20th-century activators, has been writing for Interact since 1974. He is our most prolific social studies author. Several of his personal favorites include GREEKS, VIKINGS, SKINS, FIFTIES, THE TRIAL OF LOUIS XVI, and several units in the GREAT AMERICAN CONFRONTATIONS and GREAT AMERICAN LIVES series. Most recently he co-authored CIVIL WAR. For nearly 30 years Bill has taught American History to all levels of students in Fountain Valley High School in Fountain Valley, California.

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# FIRST AMERICANS ARRIVE: c. 11,000 B.C.

## BACKGROUND ESSAY

**Setting:** Beringian Land Bridge and North America

**Time:** c. 28,000 to 11,000 B.C.

“  
Perhaps  
50,000  
years  
ago  
or  
more  
...  
”

This activator will involve you and your classmates in one of the world's greatest migrations. Perhaps 50,000 years ago or more, nomadic Asians crossed a land bridge connecting Asia and North America and initiated the discovery of a New World long before Europeans touched upon the continent's soil. These first “Indians” gradually fanned out all over a vast continent never before inhabited by humans. You and your wandering band will cross Beringia's bridge and explore this new land. Many of you will be persuaded by others to settle in a certain region. As you do, you will learn about America's original immigrants, their diversity, and the geography of the regions in which they settled just before the Europeans arrived.

“  
To add  
to the  
image  
...  
”

**Breaking the stereotype** Many Americans think of Indians inaccurately, visualizing Indians as horse-riding, red-skinned warriors with face paint and feathers. These stereotyped historical figures probably fire arrows from a bow, throw tomahawks, wear moccasins, and, when in camp, live in tepees. They use the American buffalo for implements, utensils, food, and clothing. The reality is that parts of this description fit historical American “Indians” in only one particular region, the Great Plains. Here Plains Indians, the Comanche, Sioux, and Cheyenne, have played major roles (literally) in our movies and TV “horse operas”—all of which have helped perpetuate an inaccurate and narrow stereotype.



**Native Americans** Many Americans have not only stereotyped Indians; they have also incorrectly labeled them. Early European discoverers, convinced they had touched upon the East Indies of Asia, misnamed the native peoples “Indians,” creating a problem in most parts of the world with regards to people from India. Anthropologists today refer to Indians as Amerinds or Amerindians. More widespread for today's population is the term Native Americans. Over the centuries, Indians were also called “redmen” or “redskins,” an incorrect reference to their skin color. Certainly, with Asian characteristics, the skin color is a shade or two darker than whites from Europe, yet the designation “red” clearly is as inappropriate as it is offensive to some.

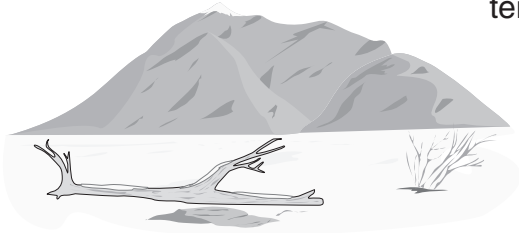
## BACKGROUND ESSAY - 2

**Asian origins** Scientists, anthropologists, archaeologists, and geologists keep pushing back the time when Asian arrived in “America.” What is certain is that evidence (blood type, ear wax, and many physical similarities of what is called the mongoloid race) shows the forebears of this immigration into the North American continent once lived on the Siberian tundra, hunting animals with primitive weapons, living in near freezing conditions, and wearing clothes fashioned from caribou fur. This simple hard life had one rule: follow the herds of life-sustaining animals or perish. While this pattern of Siberian life took place, the world was in the midst of the last ice age when great glaciers covered the lands of the Northern Hemisphere.

“

...  
wondrous  
sights in  
a semi-Eden  
land

...



”

**Beringia** The last ice age had profound implications for migration from the Old World to the New World. With the drop in sea levels, Beringia, a land bridge between Asia and America, appeared. Its existence invited Asians eager to leave the difficult nomadic life of Eastern Siberia to risk the journey across the wide and long “highway” to what is now Alaska. Off and on over the next millennia, 34,000 BC to 30,000 BC and 26,000 BC to 11,000 BC, migrating Asian hunter-gatherers braved the stark, forbidding Beringia (now the Bering Strait) and the ice sheets that lay across Southern Alaska and Canada to travel through the uncharted ice-free corridors of the North American continent. The Asians who survived such ordeals eventually came upon wondrous sights in a semi-Eden land thick with vegetation and swarming with animal life.

**Descendants** From these intrepid First Americans came their descendants who would populate the two continents from Alaska to the tip of South America. These peoples would eventually be called *Native Americans*. As these new immigrants reached a new region, they decided to stay or move on. Over the centuries, they came upon many different geographic regions with great varieties of animal and plant life, most of which these hunters had never seen before in their largely barren ancestral Asian homelands.

“

...  
differences  
were dictated  
by their geo-  
graphy and  
environment

...

”

**Diversity** The descendants of the prehistoric pioneers, despite being related in some ways, would become mostly diverse. Many tribes were still simple nomads; others were forest-dwellers surviving as hunters and fishermen. Still other tribes practiced agriculture. Many lived in adobe cities; others lived in tepees and wooden long-houses. Thus, the millennia before 1500 produced great variations in customs, traditions, foods, tribal organization, shelters, weapons, languages, and ways to obtain a food supply. Most of these differences were dictated by their geography and environment.

## BACKGROUND ESSAY - 3



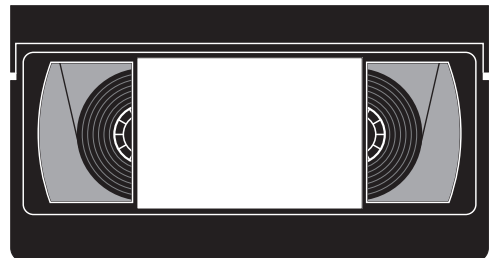
**Cross Beringia and settle down** Now it is time for your tribe to decide to settle in one of the continent's many regions. If you are one of the first immigrants to arrive, you will try to persuade later arrivals to immigrate to your region. If chosen to be a part of the second “wave” of Siberian immigrants, listen carefully to the “natives” who want you and your tribe to settle with them. First, however, put on an extra caribou cape, load up your dogs, and brave the elements of the Beringian land bridge to America!

### Resources to consult

- Debelius, Maggie. *The First Americans* (The American Indians Series). Alexandria, Virginia: Time Life Books, 1992.
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- Hakim, Joy. *The First Americans*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Hassrick, Royal B. *The Colorful Story of North American Indians*. London: Octopus Books, 1974.
- Oakley, Ruth. *The Marshall Cavendish Illustrated History of the North American Indians: In the Beginning*. New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1991.
- Reader's Digest. *America's Fascinating Indian Heritage*. Pleasantville, New York: The Reader's Digest Association, Inc., 1978. (This book is a fine survey of regional Indian diversity.)

### Visual history

- **Documentaries:** *500 Nations* (Episode 2 deals with First Americans) shown on CBS in April 1995 (50 min.); *The Infinite Voyage: The Search for Ancient Americans*, shown on PBS in April 1995; *Native Americans 1994-95*, Scholastic/NBC News Video.
- **Film:** *A Man Called Horse* starring Richard Harris (1970). In one 15-minute segment, an Englishman goes through the pain of hanging by his pectorals in an Indian ritual common to the people of the Plains.



## POSTSCRIPT - 1

“

...  
Native Americans  
or



Amerinds

”

The prehistoric bands which left Beringia and fanned out over North America and South America became the peoples we now call Native-Americans or Amerinds. Regardless of the exact time when they arrived, the fact remains that American Indians had two vast continents to themselves. Then in the 1500s the Europeans came to these shores and forever altered the different cultures and societies nurtured over thousands of years.

The Norse, according to the sagas and physical evidence, came first. Around A.D. 1000 Leif Erickson most likely led a small expedition from Greenland to Newfoundland. A later expedition of Greenlanders quarreled with local Indians. This skirmish was first recorded in a saga of two cultures in conflict.

Next, Christopher Columbus, an Italian sailing under flags of Spain, came to the New World and touched on islands in the Caribbean and on mainland South America. Following Columbus came a flood of explorers and settlers from Spain, France, Netherlands, and, especially, England. Most Europeans treated Native Americans poorly, ready to dispose of them, or exploit them, rather than see them as equals or “noble savages.” Thus, the world of the Indian began to crumble as Europeans and their descendants swept into the interior of the continents.

Eventually, the Spanish colonized and ruled Central America and South America. They Christianized the Indians, but in most cases, they never really accepted Indian culture and society. Indians, including advanced civilizations such as the Aztecs and Incas, were conquered (or annihilated), converted, and often enslaved.

The Indians fared no better in North America. The English colonists, as early as the Puritans in the 17th century, portrayed the natives as savages and children of Satan. Over the next two and one-half centuries, until 1900, the history of Native Americans is a tragic chronicle of conquest, deceit, and betrayal by the English and later by the Anglo-Americans. One historian estimates, as an example of this deceit, that more than 400 treaties, perhaps signed in “good faith” by U.S. government officials, were broken.

## POSTSCRIPT - 2

Additionally, many tribes were wiped out by “white man’s diseases,” most likely smallpox and cholera. Even more tribes were removed often at bayonet point from their ancestral lands to make way for land-hungry farmers, railroaders, or gold-seeking miners. By the late 19th century, Indians became wards of the U.S. government, now responsible for the social and economic welfare of its earliest peoples. Many were put on reservations, uninviting plots of land in mostly undesirable regions of the country.

### For your information

*As European and North American civilizations met, the so-called “Columbian Exchange” also began an hemispheric ‘swap’ of peoples, plants, animals, and diseases that, starting in 1493, altered the world.*

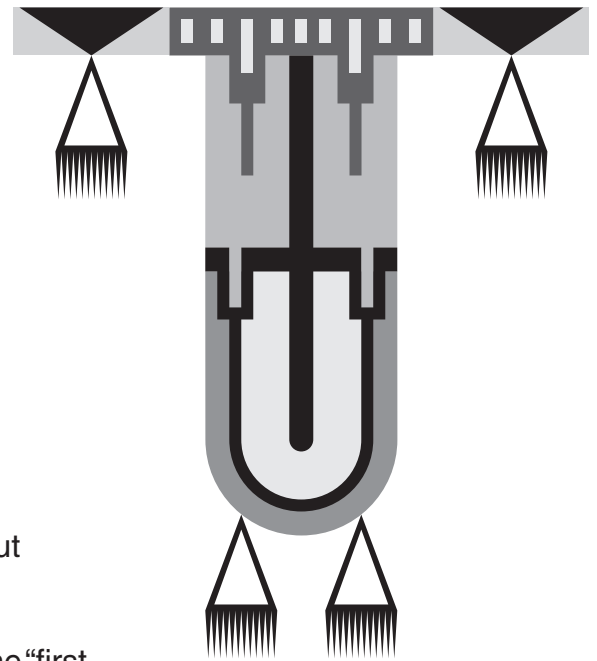
**To North America:**  
*horse, cow, sheep, coffee, orange, banana, daisy, carnation, chicken, honey bee, small pox, measles.*

**To Europe:**  
*corn, potato, tomato, chili pepper, squash, pumpkin, peanut, pecan, cashew, pineapple, turkey, petunia, tobacco, syphilis.*

What appears to be a “bad deal at the trading post” may require a second look to see a more positive Indian legacy. True, some of today’s Native Americans live in poverty, face a continuing problem of alcoholism, and see their youth torn between two distinct societies. Nevertheless, the impact of their overall legacy is immense. Indian place names (e.g., Illinois, Wisconsin, Mississippi River), foods (corn, potatoes, tomatoes, chocolate, pumpkin), essential medicines (ipecac, petroleum jelly, quinine), and a living-within-nature value system have enriched the history of not only the United States but also the world as well.

Thus, the descendants of the “first Americans” have a mixed legacy. A recent history of discrimination, pain, struggle, and identity is countered with a proud heritage of cultural achievements and simple lifestyle that many Americans today acknowledge and admire.

“  
...  
a proud heritage  
of cultural  
achievements  
...  
”



# THE NORTHWEST PACIFIC COAST - 1

## Our People of the Northwest Pacific Coast

You may wish to embellish the information below with outside research.

- **Climate/Environment** We live along the waters of the Pacific Ocean on the northwest region of the continent. Our days are cool and damp, and many trees grow very tall. Our winters are mild; our summers never get hot.
- **Food** Our staple is fish, including halibut, salmon, cod, and shellfish. Our diet is supplemented with small forest animals, berries, and nuts.
- **Tribes** We will be called by others Haida, Bella Coola, Tillamook, Nootka, Coos, Karok, Hupa, Yurok, and Chinook.
- **Special attractions** We pride ourselves in our great baskets, carved wooden boxes, canoes, decorated hides, and pieces of hammered copper. Our totem poles are famous among our people in other nearby regions. Most of all, our potlatches will lure fun-loving people to our region. These lengthy feasts and celebrations of weddings, naming an heir, or removing the stigma of a shameful accident, are big expensive parties which are so costly that those who sponsor them squander their fortunes providing food and gifts.
- **Living conditions** We live in large, gabled, plank houses with door poles that have large and colorful family crests on them. Totem poles, which have no religious significance, add to the magnificence of our communities.
- **Religion** We believe in many spiritual beings—ravens, bears, whales, eagles, and beaver. We have shamans who use magic to deceive and to enhance their prestige.
- **Appearance and fashion** We wear simple, rough shirts or robes of fur or shredded bark. Sometimes in summer our men wear nothing or don breechcloths. Our women always wear plant-fiber skirts. When the weather is cold, furs and hides suffice as cloaks or capes. We rarely wear moccasins, but we do put on hats in rainy season. Interestingly, we pierce our noses to hold ornaments, and some men of our tribes grow mustaches and even beards. Many of our men and women wear beautiful tattoos.



Research For ...  
FOR HISTORY

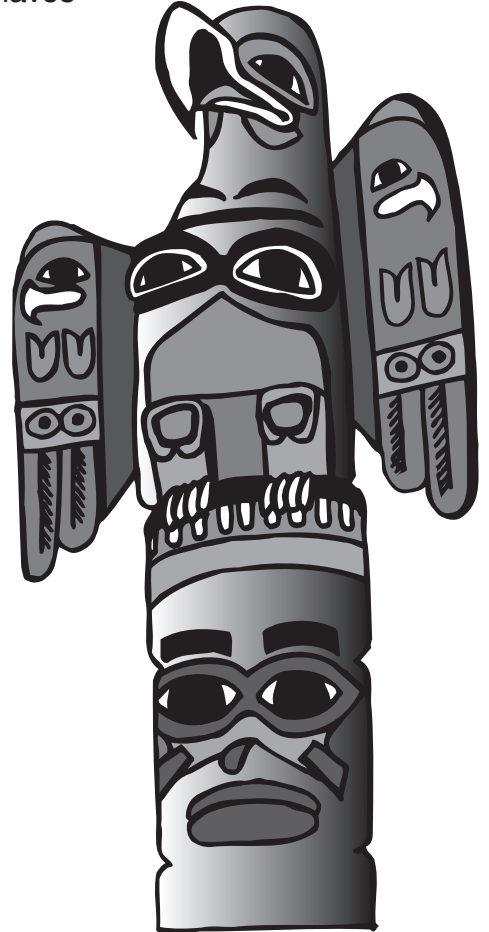


# ... Your Presentation ...

## THE NORTHWEST PACIFIC COAST - 2

- **Behavior/War** We try to avoid making war, but if war happens we use clubs, daggers, spears, and bow and arrows. We usually make slaves of our enemies.
- **Transportation** We travel mostly by water, in large, impressive canoes called dug-outs, some up to 60 feet long hollowed from one single tree. Occasionally, we use longer ships to harpoon whales far from shore.

**Demonstration** Before hand, research totem poles and make an abbreviated pole using covered up cylinder cartons from oatmeal products. Also consider rolled tagboard or cardboard tubes from paper products.



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**Presentation suggestions:** Pretend you are members of the local chamber of commerce, eager and proud to convince people to visit and settle in your community. Work to turn every flaw into an advantage or asset. Occasionally use modern slang. ("This is a really 'cool' place to live. Moving here will be a decision you'll never regret," etc.) Do extra research on your region and tribe. Have "audience" members whom you are recruiting come forward to assist you during your presentation. Use audiovisual aids (a drum beat along with a recorder instrument). Use a map to explain visual statistics. Keep your presentation within the time limit given to you.

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# THE NORTHEAST AND EASTERN WOODLANDS - 1

## Our People of the Northeast and Eastern woodlands

(You may wish to embellish the information below with outside research)

- **Climate/Environment** Our influence stretches over a land between the Atlantic coast and the Mississippi River. We experience all seasons in our mostly forested region.
- **Food** We eat a great variety of foods, including deer, bear, nuts, rabbit, woodchucks, geese, partridge, duck, corn, beans, squash, and lots of fish and shellfish. Specialties are corn dumplings and real maple syrup, baked apples, and smoked meat.
- **Tribes** We will be called Iroquois, Powhatan, Delaware, Kickapoo, Huron, Mohawk, Algonquin, Winnebago, Shawnee, Seneca, and Tobacco.
- **Special attractions** We have given to language several important words: hickory, hominy, moccasin, wigwam, and wampum (beads or shells used as “money”). We have created the most powerful and sophisticated tribes north of Mesoamerica. We invented the idea of a confederacy. We are fierce warriors and great hunters of moose. We make marvelous false face masks, some with horse hair. Members of the False Face Society wear these masks during healing rituals. We are very skilled with the bow and the arrow.
- **Living conditions** Some of us live in tents made of animal skins. These wigwams are easily portable, but most of us live in wooden “longhouses,” which are rectangular buildings with barrel-shaped roofs within a stockade.
- **Religion** We worship numerous spirits but the most important is the Master of Life, the Supreme Being. We have powerful shamans, some of whom practice magic. We revere old age, and death releases us into a world without pain, illness, and sadness.
- **Appearance and fashion** Men wear really comfortable breechcloths, leggings, shirts, and moccasins. We shave or pluck out our hair, except for a strip of hair that stands up from the forehead to the back of the head (called much later, “the mohawk”). As a taunt to our enemy, some of us grow a scalplock, that hangs down the back of the head.



Research For ...  
FOR RESEARCH FOR ...