

The First Americans Unit Overview: U.S. History, 7th Grade

Driving Concept 1: Indigenous Nations and Early European Colonization: Political, Social, and Economic Structures of the Americas in the 15th and 16th Century

Through this driving concept, students will analyze the scientific and cultural innovations of diverse, Indigenous societies across the Americas, with particular attention to the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries. Using historical evidence, students will interrogate the origins of the idea that the Americas were a lightly populated wilderness prior to European contact by studying the complex and highly organized societies of Indigenous communities and nations of the Eastern Coast of North America along with the chiefdoms of the Southeast. Students will review primary and secondary sources — including both Indigenous and European accounts — to analyze the geographical, political and social impact of early interactions, with themes of both conquest and resilience.

Essential Question

How do primary and secondary sources help historians understand the past and explain the diverse ways of life of Indigenous societies in North America, including their interactions with the natural environment?

The First Americans Unit Overview: U.S. History, 7th Grade

About This Unit

Unit 1: The First Americans explores the rich history and diverse cultures of Indigenous peoples across the Americas. Students will delve into the scientific, cultural, and societal innovations of Indigenous communities through an exploration of primary and secondary sources. Throughout the unit, students will encounter common myths and misconceptions about the original inhabitants of the continent and will analyze evidence in the form of artifacts, creation stories, and historical records to challenge these ideas. By studying the complex, highly organized, and interconnected societies of Indigenous America, students will learn to assess the accuracy of different perspectives and build a more nuanced understanding of Indigenous history and cultures. The unit culminates in the creation (first draft) of a children's book. They will use the evidence learned throughout the unit to counter stereotypes and consider Indigenous representation.

Use the Best Practices Repository for information on implementing every strategy and lesson activity!

The First Americans Unit Overview: U.S. History, 7th Grade

Priority Standards	
7.2	Analyze the collection and use of anthropological and archeological evidence, including an analysis of the tension between Western anthropological or archeological practices and Indigenous scientific knowledge, to draw conclusions about Indigenous societies in the Americas.
7.4	Compare the different ways Indigenous societies adapted to the land and climate and how they shaped their environments between 1400 and 1600.
7.8	7.8 Compare the different cultural, religious and/or spiritual belief systems of early Indigenous societies, with a particular focus on the role of gender and family, including the history of Two-Spirit identities between 1400 and 1600.

The First Americans Unit Overview: U.S. History, 7th Grade

Additional Standards	
7.1	Evaluate historical and cultural sources — archaeological, genetic, and linguistic evidence and Indigenous Nations' creation stories — to support claims about the history of early human migration to the Americas.
7.3	Locate and identify Indigenous Nations, tribes and/or communities from the 1400s through the present day on maps.
7.5	Explain the development of technological and scientific innovations of at least three Indigenous societies between 1400 and 1600.
7.6	Evaluate the agricultural developments and accomplishments of at least three Indigenous societies in the Americas between 1400 and 1600.
7.7	Compare the complex systems of governments of at least three Indigenous societies, including chiefdoms and structures that had democratic characteristics between 1400 and 1600.
7.14	Assess the ways Indigenous Nations have been portrayed in American history and popular culture and the limitations of such portrayals in understanding the diverse communities that comprise the "Native American" identity.

The First Americans Unit Overview: U.S. History, 7th Grade

Unit Preview		
<i>Subtopic(s)</i>	<i>Compelling Question</i>	<i>Standard(s)</i>
Origins of the First Americans	How do historians use artifacts, oral history, and evolving research on the first Americans to construct and revise a historical narrative?	7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.6
Diversity of Indigenous American Life	How did interactions among Indigenous peoples shape and reflect the diversity and interconnectedness of their cultures, traditions, and ways of life?	7.3, 7.4, 7.5, 7.6, 7.7, 7.8
Assessment		7.3, 7.4, 7.5, 7.6, 7.7, 7.8, 7.14



Evaluating Evidence: Unit Focus Skill

Thinking historically means identifying the evidence related to a claim, assessing its validity, and corroborating it by comparing multiple sources' interpretations of events, developments, or processes.

Origins of the First Americans: Topic Overview

	<u>LESSON 1 (60 MINS)</u>	<u>LESSON 2 (120 MINS)</u>	<u>LESSON 3 (60 MINS)</u>
SUPPORTING QUESTION	How does the study of artifacts contribute to the creation of a historical narrative?	How does oral history contribute to the crafting of a historical narrative?	How can artifacts and oral history challenge historical narratives?
STANDARD(S)	7.2, 7.3, 7.6	7.1, 7.3	7.1, 7.2
FOCUS SKILL(S)	Evaluating Evidence Historical Significance	Evaluating Evidence Historical Empathy	Evaluating Evidence
DO FIRST	Frayer: Artifact Prediction	Frayer: Oral History Notice, Wonder, Think	Frayer: Indigenous Notice, Wonder, Think
ACTIVITY 1 - LAUNCH	Introduction to Inquiry Journals + Topic 1 Supporting Questions	"What is Historical Empathy?" Introduction to Oral History	Introduction to THINKS
ACTIVITY 2- PRACTICE	Video: Colonialism & Acquisition "How Archaeologists Study the Past" Reading and Questions	Indigenous Creation Stories	"The First Americans" + THINKS
ACTIVITY 3- EXHIBIT	Artifact Investigation Gallery Walk	Inside/Outside Circle	"The First Americans" Claims Testing
CONCLUSION	Exit Ticket: DOK Question Generation	Historical Empathy Graphic Organizer	Unit 1 Inquiry Journal Topic 1: Compelling Question



Diversity of Indigenous American Life: Topic Overview

	<u>LESSON 4 (120 MINS)</u>	<u>LESSON 5 (60-120 MINS)</u>
SUPPORTING QUESTION	In what ways did tribes from various regions of North America exhibit similarities and differences in their cultures, traditions, and ways of life?	How did trade between tribes help spread culture between different Native American regions in North America?
STANDARD(S)	7.4, 7.5, 7.6, 7.7, 7.8	7.3, 7.4, 7.8
FOCUS SKILL(S)	Evaluating Evidence Comparison	Evaluating Evidence Comparison
DO FIRST	Frayer: Society A-Z Guide	Frayer: Network Anticipatory Guide
ACTIVITY 1 - LAUNCH	Inquiry Journal Topic 2: Supporting Questions	Indigenous Networks Gallery Walk Indigenous Networks Presentation
ACTIVITY 2- PRACTICE	"What is Evaluating Evidence?" "Native Nations" Reading and Graphic Organizer	Formative Assessment Indigenous Trade Networks-EVI Class Discussion (Optional)
ACTIVITY 3- EXHIBIT	Mythbusters	Review Anticipatory Guide (Optional)
CONCLUSION	Exit Ticket- Classroom Mingle	Unit 1 Inquiry Journal Topic 2: Compelling Question

Assessment: Topic Overview

	<u>LESSON 6 (60 MINS)</u>	<u>LESSON 7 (120 MINS)</u>
SUPPORTING QUESTION	What are the impacts of underrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in children's literature?	How does the portrayal of Indigenous people in historical and contemporary media influence attitudes towards Indigenous cultures and issues?
STANDARD(S)	7.14	7.14
FOCUS SKILL(S)	Evaluating Evidence Historical Significance	Quantitative Analysis Evaluating Arguments
DO FIRST	Frayer: Representation Quote Reflection	Frayer: Stereotype Quickwrite
ACTIVITY 1 - LAUNCH	Inquiry Journal Assessment: Supporting Questions	Formative Assessment - Diversity in Children's Books - Quantitative Analysis
ACTIVITY 2- PRACTICE	Four Corners	Indigenous Myths and Stereotypes Gallery Walk
ACTIVITY 3- EXHIBIT	"Native Representation in Children's Books is Lacking" + THINKS + Evaluating Evidence	Indigenous Children's Book Evaluation
CONCLUSION	Exit Ticket- Triangle, Square, Circle	Exit Ticket- Write and Draw



Assessment: Topic Overview Continued

	LESSON 8 (60 MINS)	<u>LESSON 8 (120 MINS)</u>
SUPPORTING QUESTION	Place-Based Lesson Extension <i>See page 10 for lesson options and view Best Practice Repository for additional information about implementation</i>	How do primary and secondary sources help historians understand the past and explain the diverse ways of life of Indigenous societies in North America, including their interactions with the natural environment?
STANDARD(S)		All Unit Standards
FOCUS SKILL(S)		Evaluating Arguments Historical Empathy
DO FIRST		Frayer: Miseducation Notice, Wonder, Think
ACTIVITY 1 - LAUNCH		Introduction to Assessment Requirements Brainstorm and Plan Children's Book
ACTIVITY 2- PRACTICE		Create Storyboard
ACTIVITY 3- EXHIBIT		N/A
CONCLUSION		Unit 1 Inquiry Journal Essential Question



Place Based Lesson Extension

	LESSON 8 (60 MINS)
SUPPORTING QUESTION	
STANDARD(S)	
FOCUS SKILL(S)	
DO FIRST	
OPTION 1 - PODCAST	
OPTION 2 - SYNCHRONOUS PRESENTATION	
OPTION 3 - FIELD TRIP	
CONCLUSION	

The First Americans Unit Overview: U.S. History, 7th Grade

Suggested Readings and Helpful Resources:

For information on:

- [Long Distance Trade in the Americas](#)
- [Historical Empathy Explained](#)
- Native American Storytelling: A Reader of Myths and Legends by Karl Kroeber ["To The Reader"](#)
- [5 Step Approach to Chunking Creation Stories](#)

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Unit Commentary:

Unit 1 provides students with an exploration of the diverse, innovative societies of Indigenous peoples across the Americas, focusing particularly on the periods prior to European colonization. As they work through the unit, students will hone the critical skill of Evaluating Evidence, which will serve as the cornerstone of their learning. This skill is essential for understanding the historical context of Indigenous societies, particularly in addressing various myths and misconceptions that continue to shape understandings of Indigenous peoples.

Topic 1 introduces students to the early history of Indigenous peoples in the Americas, including artifacts, creation stories, and migration theories. Students will critically engage with various types of evidence and sources to understand how early societies emerged and evolved. Students will study the people of the past using methods similar to archeologists and historians.

In Topic 2 the focus broadens to explore the diversity of Indigenous societies across the Americas. Students will learn about the networks of exchange that connected different groups, highlighting the interconnectedness of Indigenous peoples, their economic systems, and their social structures. This topic emphasizes the complexity and diversity of Indigenous life, demonstrating their dynamic and thriving existence long before European colonization.

Topic 3 provides students with an opportunity to engage critically with how Indigenous peoples have been, and continue to be, portrayed, particularly in media and popular culture. Students will analyze Indigenous stereotypes, exploring how these representations have shaped public perception and often obscured the true nature of Indigenous societies. The assessment concludes with the creation of a Children's Book, in which students will use the knowledge and evidence they've gathered throughout the unit to challenge a common myth about American Indians. The children's book serves as both a creative and educational tool, allowing students to apply their critical thinking skills and present a more accurate portrayal of Indigenous peoples. This final project encourages students to synthesize their learning and communicate it in a way that is both informative and respectful, emphasizing the complexity and richness of Indigenous cultures.

By the end of this unit, students will have developed a deeper understanding of the diverse societies of Indigenous peoples in the Americas and the skills necessary to critically assess historical evidence. Through their analysis of primary and secondary sources, students will gain a more nuanced understanding of the impact of European colonization and the resilience of Indigenous communities.