Tribal Resources

Early Learning Resources for Providers: Centering Tribal Nation Awareness and Serving American Indian/Alaska Native Children & Families

Oregon Department of Early Learning and Care

This resource is intended to promote understanding of Native peoples, traditions, and offer ways for providers to incorporate learning into the classroom. All children, both Native and non-Native, benefit from accurate, respectful information about Native Peoples and culture. Early childhood is the time to start laying the groundwork for better understanding.

Did you know?

No matter where you are in Oregon, you are always on Indigenous homelands.

Children may not grasp how "long ago" some events happened or exactly where they occurred, but they can understand that Native people, past and present, are essential parts of the world's story. The Department of Early Learning and care (DELC) suggests weaving reliable information about Native Americans into your early learning settings all year long, including November, the designated National Native American Heritage Month. Here are some ways to do that:

Gain a Basic Understanding of Native Peoples

DELC invites you to learn about traditions and cultural practices of Native peoples in your region. Elements of culture may show up in various ways for Native Americans, like use of cradle boards, differing educational priorities such as an emphasis on traditional and cultural knowledge, or in family structures which are often inclusive of extended family. These considerations can help early childhood professionals establish solid connections with Native families. Read on to enhance your knowledge and increase your understanding.



American Indian/Alaska Native Facts

- There are 574 Federally Recognized Tribes, each holding distinct languages, cultures, and histories
- Tribes are sovereign nations with the authority to create and enforce laws, determine citizenship, hold elections, manage land, regulate commerce, and engage in government-to-government relationships
- Tribal membership is a political status and not a designation of race or ethnicity
- American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) Head Start provides grants to Tribes across the United States

Frequent Characteristics of American Indian/Alaska Native Early Learners[1]

- Engage in hands-on learning through doing
- Value success for its own sake rather than for external rewards
- Emphasize being present rather than becoming something else.
- Collaborate to support collective success
- Express ideas through action and behavior, not only through speech
- Develop listening skills as a key learning approach
- Listen actively and observe carefully to learn from people and environments
- Participate in storytelling to understand, learn, and share knowledge

As teachers, we may feel we are always supposed to "have the answers." But we need to accept that we may have a lot to learn in some areas. Information about Native Americans is likely to be one of those areas for many of us.

Use teacher materials developed to reflect Native American perspectives

We recommend utilizing these resources with intention, avoiding performative inclusion. The activities outlined below are best integrated regularly and meaningfully as part of a well-rounded early learning experience.

- Explore Native Knowledge 360° from the National Museum of the American Indian — a comprehensive hub of culturally grounded teaching materials for preschool through high school.
- The Oregon Department of Education's Native American Education Resources include valuable tools including the Essential Understandings of Native Americans in Oregon and an Educator Toolkit for culturally responsive teaching.
- Educators can draw directly from the Senate Bill 13 (2017) Tribal History/Shared History curriculum, which includes grade-appropriate lessons co-developed by the Tribes in Oregon. For early learners, storytelling activities based on the SB 13 curriculum from the Klamath Tribes, or the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians, offer authentic content that reflects place-based knowledge and cultural traditions.
- For deeper reflection, read "Teaching Respect for Native Peoples" by Cynthia Leitich Smith, and browse the IEL's curated list on Teaching and Learning about Native Americans, which connects educators with reliable classroom resources.

1 Pewewardy, C. (2002). Learning Styles of American Indian/Alaska Native Students: A Review of the Literature and Implications for Practice. Journal of American Indian Education, 41(3), 22–56. jstor.org/stable/24398583

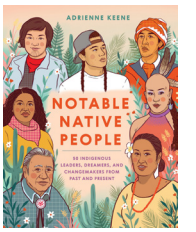
- Younger learners can benefit from PK–2 Student-Centered Digital Learning Activities from the National Indian Education Association, including basket weaving, corn husk dolls, traditional games, and lessons on Native stories and food.

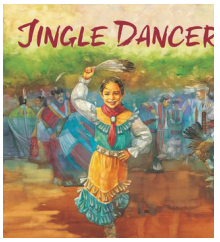
Full resource links can be found in **Appendix A**

Talk about Native Peoples in the Present Tense

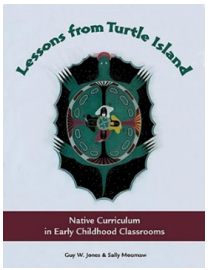
Indigenous peoples are very much present today, with more than 6 million individuals identifying as American Indian or Alaska Native in the United States. When talking with young children, it's important to use present-tense language, such as is and are, when referring to Native peoples and communities. Using present-tense language helps children understand that Native American communities are not just part of history, they are vibrant, living cultures that continue to thrive today. This small but meaningful shift supports a more accurate and respectful understanding of Native peoples as part of our shared present and future.

- Contemporary Indigenous leaders like John Herrington (Chickasaw Nation), the first Native American astronaut, and Deb Haaland (Laguna Pueblo), the 54th U.S. Secretary of the Interior, serve as powerful role models. For more biographies, see *Notable Native People* by Adrienne Keene, a curated collection of stories highlighting 50 Indigenous changemakers from both past and present.





- To support visual representation in your classroom, explore media collections from the American Indian Center of Chicago and the National Museum of the American Indian. For storytelling through photography, *Project 562* by Matika Wilbur offers powerful portraits from every federally recognized U.S. Tribe. Additional image-based stories can be found through Indigenous news outlets, artist features, and cultural magazines.
- To introduce Native stories through children's picture books, consider titles like *Mission to Space* by John Herrington and *Jingle Dancer* by Cynthia Leitich Smith. More book recommendations are available through curated award lists and book guides focused on Native representation in children's and young adult literature.
- For culturally responsive approaches to early learning, *Lessons from Turtle Island* by Guy W. Jones and Sally Moomaw provides practical activities and teaching strategies rooted in Indigenous perspectives.



See Appendix B for a full list of books, websites, and media resources referenced in this section.

Talk about specific Native Nations

Native people aren't all the same. You can help children see that by referring to a Native person's Nation.

- For example, you can say, "The author of this book is Daniel Vandever, a Diné writer from the Navajo Nation." Diné is the term Navajo people use to refer to themselves, honoring their cultural identity and sovereignty as a distinct Tribal Nation.
- Invite Tribally identified Native families in your program to talk to the children about their Tribal Nations and family traditions, if they are willing.

Include Native perspectives throughout your curriculum

From Tribal music to Native languages and first foods, incorporating Native frames of reference into the classroom will enrich children's learning experience and broaden their awareness of the world around them.

- Consider building lessons around videos created for children that highlight Native American cultures. Examples include the animated PBS Kids series *Molly of Denali* and the Illinois State Museum's digital exhibit Native People of Illinois.
- Invite children to explore traditional Native foods specific to the Tribes in Oregon, such as Camas, which has long been used by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, and others. They can also learn about Wapato, a wetland plant traditionally gathered by the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians, the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, and several other Tribes in Oregon.
- Encourage children to discover Indigenous ingredients that have grown on this continent for thousands of years; corn, squash, beans, huckleberries, acorns, and more. Librarians can help you find cookbooks that highlight Native foodways, such as *Original Local* by Heid E. Edrich and *The Sioux Chef* by Sean Sherman.
- To explore Indigenous languages, share Native words related to everyday items being studied in class. For example, the word "corn" varies across Native languages. Families in your program may be able to share relevant vocabulary, and many Tribal nations offer audio, video, or app-based language resources through their official websites. For example, the Siletz Dee-ni Language Project offers a digital dictionary and mobile app; the Grand Ronde Language Program provides classroom videos in Chinuk Wawa; and the Warm Springs Language Program supports language learning through community classes and recordings. These programs can enrich classroom activities and deepen children's awareness of Oregon's living languages.
- Tribes may operate their own early learning centers integrating Tribal language, cultural teachings, and traditional parenting practices into the curriculum. For example, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation run the Cay-Uma-Wa Head Start Program, and the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs operate an Early Childhood Education Center. Early learning providers can learn from these models by building relationships with local Tribal early childhood educators.
- To further enrich classroom experiences, consider incorporating music by Native artists into your classroom setting. The Native American Music Awards (NAMA) website includes streaming songs and videos suitable for classroom use. We recommend previewing all materials in advance to ensure cultural and age appropriateness.

See Appendix C for links to all videos, exhibits, language programs, music platforms, and recommended books mentioned in this section.

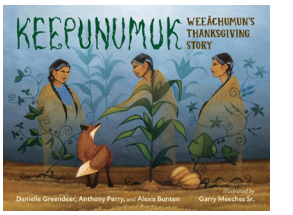
Sharing Accurate Stories about Thanksgiving in Early Childhood Settings

While it is important to integrate Native American history and cultures throughout the year, many early childhood programs primarily explore these topics during the Thanksgiving season. Native American history began long before Europeans arrived, and the traditional story of Thanksgiving perpetuates harmful stereotypes and false narratives regarding the interactions between European colonists and Tribal peoples.

- When children hear stories that portray Thanksgiving as a peaceful and mutual celebration without context, it can lead to misunderstandings and reinforce harmful stereotypes.
- All children, Native and non-Native, deserve the opportunity to engage with respectful and age-appropriate representations of history and culture.
- For example, the common Thanksgiving narrative can overlook the complex realities of colonization, including the forced removal of Native peoples from their homelands. These historical realities are important for building understanding and empathy.

How Early Learning Providers Can Support Historically AccurateTeaching

- Choose material that center Indigenous voices and provide accurate cultural context.
- Avoid stereotypes in decorations, crafts, or dress-up activities that may unintentionally misrepresent Native cultures.



- Use age-appropriate books such as *Keepunumuk: Weeâchumun's* ***Thanksgiving Story***, which offers a Wampanoag perspective and honors Indigenous knowledge.
- We encourage you to explore resources such as the "*The Real History of Thanksgiving*" (Reader's Digest, 2024), which offers a concise overview of the historical context and evolving narratives around the holiday. You may also find *Rethinking Thanksgiving*, created by the authors of *Keepunumuk*, to be a valuable resource for reframing classroom discussions.

By taking thoughtful steps, early childhood educators can help children develop a more accurate and inclusive understanding of history and celebrate cultural diversity with care and respect.

See Appendix D for recommended books, articles, and curriculum-based resources for teaching about Thanksgiving and Indigenous perspectives.

Voices from the Tribes in Oregon

"When we teach our little ones their first words in Umatilla, we're not just teaching language, we're grounding them in who they are and where they come from." -
Educator, Cay-Uma-Wa Head Start Program, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation

"Our children carry the songs and stories of our people. Early learning is the time to plant those seeds."
- Elder, Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs

"Our early learning program helps children and families connect with their heritage while preparing for school. Culture and education go hand in hand."
- Director, Grand Ronde Early Learning Center, Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde

"I tell teachers: bring our stories into your classrooms. They're not just history, they're tools for helping all children grow." - Parent & Cultural Advisor, Klamath Tribes

These voices offer firsthand insights into the importance of language, culture, and identity in early learning. settings.

Related Oregon Child Care Rules

Licensed child care providers are expected to communicate and interact with children and families in a way that creates a healthy, culturally responsive environment for the children in their care. The following rules are related to this topic and the caregivers' role in establishing a positive, respectful program.

Certified Centers (CC) OAR 414-305-0510; 414-305-0525

Certified School-age Centers (SC) OAR 414-310-0380; 414-310-0400

Certified Family Homes (CF) OAR 414-360-0510

Certified Outdoor Nature Based Programs (ONB) OAR 414-320-0510; 414-320-0525

Registered Family Homes (RF) OAR 4140-210-0510

Resources for Early Childhood Educators

Tools for Early Childhood Professionals: zerotothree.org/resources/for-professionals/

Professional Development: oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/equity/NativeAmericanEducation/Pages/Senate-Bill-13-Tribal-HistoryShared-History.aspx

SB 13 Curriculum: docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1ZihySUsSYjxSrwfDRVaJzynmZpHlltutsuPpZXm9shI/edit#gid=1608360074

The First People - Oregon 250: oregon250.org/the-first-people/
This is an educational resource, developed as part of the Oregon 250 commemoration, that provides a respectful introduction to the nine Tribes. The site includes accessible information about each Tribe's history, culture, and ongoing contribution, emphasizing sovereignty, continuity, and resilience. It's designed to counter historical erasure; the content highlights the fact that the Tribes in Oregon were here long before statehood and remain vital to its future. Early learning providers can use this resource to gain foundational knowledge about local Tribal Nations and support culturally responsive learning environments for Native children and families.

Sources

National Indian Child Care Association: nicca.us/

National Indian Head Start Director's Association: nihsda.org/

Portland State University Indigenous First Steps: Students, Family, Culture, Community Project: sites.google.com/pdx.edu/ifs-project/home

Tribal Websites

Burns Paiute Tribe

- Website: burnspaiute-nsn.gov/

Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians

- Website: https://ctclusi.org/
- Explore the Abundance Story Map: clusi.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Cascade/index.html?appid=27e3174e06514e55b45d7a0cef5a59f9

Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde

- Website: grandronde.org/
- Tribal History Curriculum: grandronde.org/history-culture/culture/curriculum/
- Early Learning Curriculum: grandronde.org/history-culture/culture/curriculum/early-learning-curriculum/

Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians

- Website: ctsi.nsn.us/
- Tribal History/Shared History Curriculum: ctsi.nsn.us/sb-13-curriculum/

Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation

- Website: ctuir.org/

Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs

- Website: warmsprings-nsn.gov/

Coquille Indian Tribe

- Website: coquilletribe.org/

Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians

- Website: cowcreek-nsn.gov/
- Tribal History Curriculum: Senate Bill 13: cowcreekeducation.com/senatebill13/

Klamath Tribes | Klamath Modoc Yahooskin

- Website: klamathtribes.org/
- Tribal History Curriculum: oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/equity/NativeAmericanEducation/Pages/Tribal%20Curriculum.aspx

Appendix A – Native American Education Resources

Title	Link
Native Knowledge 360° – National Museum of the American Indian	americanindian.si.edu/nk360
Oregon Department of Education – Native American Education Resources	oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/equity/NativeAmericanEducation/Pages/default.aspx
Teaching Respect for Native Peoples – Cynthia Leitich Smith	cynthialeitichsmith.com/lit-resources/read/reading/native-am/teachingrespect/
Teaching and Learning About Native Americans – IEL	illinoisearlylearning.org/reslists/learning-native-americans/
Student-Centered Digital Learning Activities – National Indian Education Association	niea.org/new-blog-2/student-centeredlearningactivites

Appendix B – Books, Media, and Visual Representation

Title	Link
Notable Native People – Adrienne Keene (Penguin Random House) (Young Adult/Biography)	adriennekeene.com/notable-native-people/
American Indian Center of Chicago – Educational Media	aicchicago.org/
National Museum of the American Indian – Image Collections	americanindian.si.edu/
Project 562 – Matika Wilbur	project562.com/
Indian Country Today	indiancountrytoday.com/
First American Art Magazine	firstamericanartmagazine.com/
American Indian Magazine – Smithsonian	americanindianmagazine.org/
Mission to Space – Chickasaw Press (Children's Book)	chickasawpress.com/Books/Mission-to-Space.aspx
Jingle Dancer – Cynthia Leitich Smith (Children's Book)	harpercollins.com/products/jingle-dancer-cynthia-leitich-smith
American Indian Library Association – Youth Literature Awards	ailanet.org/activities/american-indian-youth-literature-award/
American Indians in Children's Literature – Best Books	americanindiansinchildrensliterature.blogspot.com/p/best-books.html
Social Justice Books – Native Children's and YA Titles	cynthialeitichsmith.com/lit-resources/read/reading/native-am/
Lessons from Turtle Island – Redleaf Press (Educator)	bookshop.org/p/books/lessons-from-turtle-island-native-curriculum-in-early-childhood-classrooms-sally-moomaw/10895072?ean=9781929610259&next=t

Appendix C – Videos, Food, Language, and Music Resources

Title	Link
Molly of Denali – PBS Kids	pbskids.org/molly
Native People of Illinois – Illinois State Museum	youtube.com/watch?v=ELwiVJ5hiqQ
Original Local – Heid E. Erdrich	mnhs.org/mnhspress/books/original-local
The Sioux Chef – Sean Sherman	seansherman.com/
Grand Ronde Language Program	grandronde.org/government/education-department/language-program/
Siletz Tribal Language Project	siletzlanguage.org/
Warm Springs Language Program	warmsprings-nsn.gov/program/language-program/
Native American Music Awards (NAMA)	nativeamericanmusicawards.com/

Appendix D – Thanksgiving and Indigenous History Resources

Title	Link
Keepunumuk: Weeâchumun's Thanksgiving Story	keepunumuk.com/
The Real History of Thanksgiving – Reader's Digest	rd.com/article/history-of-thanksgiving/
Rethinking Thanksgiving – From the Creators of Keepunumuk	keepunumuk.com/rethinking-thanksgiving/
The Real Thanksgiving – Bioneers	bioneers.org/the-real-thanksgiving/
Teaching Kids the True Meaning of Thanksgiving – Tinkergarten	tinkergarten.com/blog/how-to-honor-the-real-story-of-thanksgiving-with-kids
Thanksgiving Lesson Plan Booklet – NASS	okcps.org/cms/lib/OK01913268/Centricity/Domain/130/NASS%20Thanksgiving%20Lesson%20Plan%20Booklet.pdf
Rethinking Columbus Day and Thanksgiving – Learning for Justice	zerotothree.org/resource/rethinking-columbus-day-and-thanksgiving/
Celebrating Native American Month – ZERO TO THREE	zerotothree.org/resource/celebrating-native-american-heritage-month/

Scan the QR code to view the digital version of this document, including clickable links and additional accessibility features.

This resource was developed by the Office of Tribal Affairs at the Oregon Department of Early Learning and Care (DELC) to support early learning providers with in building awareness and understanding of Tribal Nations and Native communities. It is intended to offer guidance and culturally respectful practices for working with Native children and families in early learning settings. If you have any questions or would like further support, please contact the DELC Office of Tribal Affairs at DELC.TribalAffairs@DELC.oregon.gov

You are entitled to language assistance services and other accommodation at no cost. If you need help in your language or other accommodations, please contact the Child Care Licensing Division at 1-800-556-6616