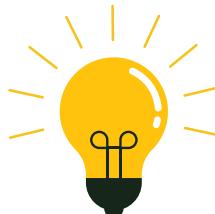


Tribal Resources

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



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 Learners¹

- 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.

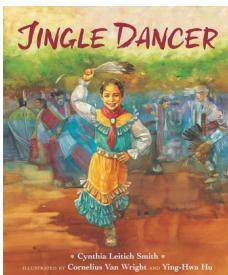
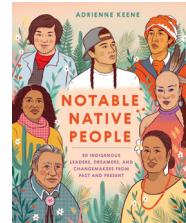
- [Explore Native Knowledge 360°](#) from the National Museum of the American Indian, a comprehensive resource hub for educators that includes culturally grounded teaching materials and ideas for preschool through high school.
- [Access Oregon Department of Education's Native American Education Resources](#), including the [Essential Understandings of Native Americans in Oregon](#) and a [downloadable Educator Toolkit](#) to support culturally responsive teaching.
- [Read "Teaching Respect for Native Peoples" by Cynthia Leitich Smith](#), a reflective article that offers practical guidance on approaching Native representation in schools with accuracy and care.
- [Browse IEL's "Teaching and Learning about Native Americans" curated resource list](#), which connects educators with reliable information for designing inclusive and accurate classroom activities.
- [Explore the National Indian Associations Student-Centered Digital Learning Activities](#), which include PK-2 lessons like weaving baskets, making corn husk dolls, playing traditional Native games, and learning about Native foods, stories, and seasonal practices.

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](https://www.jstor.org/stable/24398583)

Talk about Native Peoples in the Present Tense

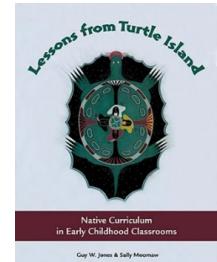
Indigenous peoples are very much present today, with more than 6 million individuals identifying as American Indian or Alaska Native in the United States. When talking with young children, it's important to use present-tense language, such as is and are, when referring to Native peoples and communities. 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 include John Herrington (Chickasaw Nation), the first Native American astronaut, and Deb Haaland (Laguna Pueblo), the 54th United States Secretary of the Interior. For more biographies, [explore 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, [access photos and educational media from the American Indian Center of Chicago](#) and [browse classroom-ready image collections from the National Museum of the American Indian](#). For storytelling through photography, [explore Project 562 by Matika Wilbur](#), featuring portraits from every federally recognized U.S. Tribe. Additional image and story sources include [Indigenous news articles on Indian Country Today](#), [art profiles and reviews on First American Art Magazine's website](#), and the [Smithsonian's digital issues of American Indian Magazine](#).



- To introduce contemporary Native stories through children's picture books, read [Mission to Space by Chickasaw astronaut John Herrington on the Chickasaw Press site](#) and [explore Jingle Dancer by Muscogee author Cynthia Leitich Smith on Heartdrum/HarperCollins](#). For broader recommendations, [visit American Indian Library Association's Youth Literature Awards archive](#), [American Indians in Children's Literature's curated "Best Books" lists](#), and [Social Justice Books' collection of Native Children's and Young Adult titles](#).

- For culturally responsive early learning, [review Lessons from Turtle Island by Guy W. Jones and Sally Moomaw on Redleaf Press](#). This guide includes activities, classroom strategies, and recommendations that help educators teach from Indigenous perspectives, with a focus on five cross-cultural themes: Children, Home, Families, Community, and the Environment.



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 PBS Kids animated series Molly of Denali ([Watch Molly of Denali on PBS Kids](#)) and the Illinois State Museum's online exhibit Native People of Illinois ([Explore Native People of Illinois exhibit](#)).
- 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.
- Help the children find out about Indigenous languages by sharing words from some of those languages during their investigations of things around them. For example, what we call "corn" in English has many Indigenous names. Native families in the program might be able to tell you some relevant words. Many Native nations are working to preserve their languages, and their official websites have video and audio resources for language learners. For example, the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde offer audio and video materials through their Shawash-ili?i Skul language immersion school ([Visit the Grand Ronde Language Program](#)). The Siletz Tribal Language Project provides downloadable resources and language tools ([Explore the Siletz Language Project](#)), and the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs Language Program shares cultural and educational language resources ([Access Warm Springs Language Program](#)).
- 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.
- Incorporate music by Native artists into your classroom setting. The Native American Music Awards (NAMA) website ([Listen to music on the NAMA website](#)) includes streaming songs and videos suitable for classroom use. We recommend previewing all materials in advance to ensure cultural and age appropriateness.

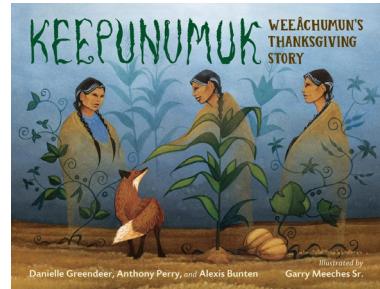
Sharing Accurate Stories about Thanksgiving in Early Childhood Settings

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 Accurate Teaching

- 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 the picture book [Keepunumuk: Weeâchumun's Thanksgiving Story](#) which offers a Wampanoag perspective and honors Indigenous knowledge.
- For your own learning and to support deeper conversations, explore resources like [The Real History of Thanksgiving \(Reader's Digest, 2024\)](#) and [Rethinking Thanksgiving](#) from the creators of Keepunumuk.



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.

You can also dive into curriculum-based resources such as [The Real Thanksgiving from Bioneers](#), [Teaching Kids the True Meaning of Thanksgiving by Tinkergarten](#), and the [Thanksgiving Lesson Plan Booklet from the Native American Student Services \(NASS\)](#). For broader context, check out [Rethinking Columbus Day and Thanksgiving](#) and [Celebrating Native American Month from ZERO TO THREE](#).

Voices from the Tribes in Oregon

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

"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

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 Experts: [Explore professional resources from Zero to Three](#)

Professional Development: [Learn more about Tribal History/Shared History \(TH/SH\): American Indian/Alaska Native Education](#) via the Oregon Department of Education

SB 13 Curriculum: [Access the Tribal History/Shared History Curriculum \(SB 13\)](#)

The First People - Oregon 250: [Visit this 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: Learn more at nicca.us/

National Indian Head Start Director's Association: visit nhsda.org/ to learn more

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

Tribal Websites

Burns Paiute Tribe

[Visit the Burns Paiute Tribe's official website](#)

Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians

[Learn more about the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians](#)

[Explore the Abundance Story Map](#) by the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians

Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde

[Visit the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde's official website](#)

[Access the Tribal History Curriculum from the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde](#)

[Read the Early Learning Curriculum from the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde](#)

Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians

[Visit the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians' official website](#)

[Explore the Tribal History/Shared History Curriculum from the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians](#)

Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation

[Visit the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation's official website](#)

Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs

[Visit the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs' official website](#)

Coquille Indian Tribe

[Visit the Coquille Indian Tribe's official website](#)

Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians

[Visit the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians' official website](#)

[View the Senate Bill 13 Tribal History Curriculum](#) by Cow Creek Education

Klamath Tribes | Klamath Modoc Yahooskin

[Visit the Klamath Tribes' official website](#)

[Access the Klamath Tribes' Tribal History Curriculum](#) via the Oregon Department of Education

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.